CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES IN FOUR HONG KONG KINDERGARTENS

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Abstract

Hong Kong kindergarten teachers, like their counterparts in many other parts of the world, face the challenges of implementing educational reforms and adopting new teaching approaches. This is especially challenging in the absence of detailed, concrete and explicit guidance on implementing new teaching approaches in daily classroom activities. The present study employed a qualitative collective case study methodology to investigate four kindergarten teachers' perspectives and pedagogical practices in relation to the adoption and implementation of project and thematic approaches in four Hong Kong kindergarten classrooms.

Three data collection methods were used, including semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations using an observation guide, and field notes. A range of strategies, including data triangulation, enhanced the credibility and dependability of the study. Key themes from the findings were identified through thematic analysis.

The findings reveal that teachers were primarily focused on pedagogical practices associated with establishing and maintaining classroom discipline and rules, and ensuring children's learning of academic skills. In the area of curriculum and pedagogical practices, the data indicated that teachers put extensive amounts of time and effort into enhancing children's academic skills. Findings also showed that few children had free-play time. In most cases, children needed to finish their homework before they engaged in play. Such

practice may affect other aspects of children's development such as creative and critical thinking, and problem solving. With regard to discipline and rules, all teachers were concerned about children's self-help skills and expected children to follow the classroom rules strictly. The teachers in this study frequently used demonstration and direct instructions to children to maintain classroom discipline and rules.

The study found that there is resistance in Confucian-heritage cultures to children's learning through play. The Confucian heritage assumes that play can disturb children's learning and create an obstacle to academic achievement. The study found that Confucian principles are one of the major factors affecting the teaching practices of the four kindergarten teachers in this study. It recommends more play time for kindergarten children in these classes and suggests that a 'play lesson', which aims at promoting children's creative and critical thinking, and problem solving skills is inserted into the daily schedule in the kindergartens.

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List of Abbreviations

BEd	Bachelor of Education
CE	Certificate of Education
COR	Child Observation Record
CPQ	Creative personality Questionnaire
CDC	Curriculum Development Council
CDI	Curriculum Development Institutes
DAP	Developmentally Appropriate Practice
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EPPE	Effective Provision of Pre-School Education
HK	Hong Kong
EDB	Hong Kong Education Bureau
NAEYC	National Association for the Education of Young Children
PRC	People's Republic of China
QKT	Qualified Kindergarten Teacher
QUT	Queensland University of Technology
SAR	Special Administrative Region
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

QUT Verified Signature

Signature:

Date: 8 October 2015

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Hong Kong (HK) kindergarten teachers, like their counterparts in many other parts of the world, face the challenges of implementing educational reforms and adopting new teaching approaches. Although they appear to be enthusiastically adopting teaching approaches imported from Western societies in order to help the children in their care to achieve high-quality learning outcomes, there are concerns that quiet struggles continue beneath the surface. Anecdotal evidence suggests that kindergarten teachers may have difficulties in understanding how to best implement new teaching approaches in their everyday classroom activities.

Newspaper reports in HK over approximately ten years have indicated the following regarding the current state of kindergarten classrooms (which serve children age three to five):

Most kindergartens have implemented curriculum reforms by implementing new teaching approaches to develop children's active learning attitudes, creativity, and problem-solving skills. However, some kindergartens have not considered children's needs, interests, and developmental stages in doing so (Ming Pao, 2004).

Many kindergartens have a heavy curriculum and a tight schedule that may hinder children's learning. Some teachers still employ teacher-centred approaches and didactic

instructional methods, which may neglect other aspects of children's development (Sing Tao, 2007).

Some kindergartens still use whole-class teaching and expect that all children will progress at the same rate (Wen Wei Po, 2008).

Eighty percent of the kindergartens still emphasize writing training and give the children too many written exercises, many of them involving copying (Ming Pao, 2004).

i) Some kindergartens still require children to memorize books and write dictated words (Sing Tao, 2007).

To provide insight into HK kindergarten teachers' perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices, this study describes and analyses the implementation of two commonly used pedagogical approaches in HK kindergartens: the thematic approach (Shoemaker, 1989) and the project approach (Katz & Chard, 2000). Both have been developed in Western societies, mainly in the United States (US), and both have been widely implemented in countries as diverse as South Korea (Jung, 2009), Turkey (e.g. Burcu & Gelengul, 2010), and HK (e.g. Chan, Lam, & Ngai, 2000). The present study investigates four HK kindergarten teachers' perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices in the context of their own classrooms, and examines the factors influencing the adoption and implementation of the two approaches in these classrooms.

The following sections of this introductory chapter present the background and

context for the study, definition of terms, the research problem, questions, aims, and significance of the study. The introduction will conclude with an outline of the chapters of this thesis.

1.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The HK government recognizes that education and care cannot be separated in the provision of services for young children (Rao, Koong, Kwong, & Wong, 2003). It has published successive iterations of its *Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum* (Curriculum Development Council [CDC], 2006) (hereafter known as *the Guide*) for both kindergartens and childcare centres for children aged three to six years, cementing the notion that pre-primary education is intended to support children's holistic development and to prepare children for formal schooling (CDC, 2006; HK Government, 1984; Curriculum Development Institute [CDI], 1996). The *Guide* pursues a child-centred approach and stresses children's all-around development. It adopts a contemporary Western view of early years teaching and learning and offers ideas for facilitating intellectual, communicative, personal, physical and aesthetic development. Although all kindergartens and nurseries have access to the *Guide*, there is no legal obligation for kindergarten staff to follow the guidelines. In actuality, less than satisfactory practices have been known to be evident in some kindergartens (Rao & Koong, 2000).

To support teachers in implementing the *Guide*'s principles, the HK government

published a *List of Do's and Don'ts for Kindergarten (List)* (Education Department, 1999), indicating what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate curriculum content and pedagogies for teaching young children. The *List* noted that children age three and four years should *not* be asked to write, or to perform mechanical learning based on memorization. It stated that teachers should *not* adopt lecturing as a form of teaching and that curricula should be designed so as not to be too difficult for kindergarten children. It recommended that kindergartens *do* (a) provide curriculum and learning activities that account for children's all-around development, (b) respect children's individual differences, and (c) teach children's mother tongue (Cantonese) as the language of instruction. In contrast to these directives, most parents prefer to have their children learn in English rather than Cantonese, as this is seen as an advantage for their later schooling (Pearson & Rao, 2006). In practice, most kindergartens teach English, both to satisfy parents and to prepare children for their future study of the language in later years (Ho, 2006; Li, 2004; Li & Rao, 2005). However, it is well documented that doing so results in a poor standard of learning in both languages (Li & Rao, 2005; Wong & Rao, 2004). Understanding this tension between parents' preferences and teaching practices is important for the present study, because parental preferences may be one of the factors that exert influence kindergarten teachers' classroom practices (Fung & Lam, 2011).

Traditionally, one of the goals of educational research in HK has been to identify ways in which successful teaching approaches from foreign settings can be adapted to the

HK context. It has become increasingly evident, from both field observation and the research literature, that teaching approaches cannot simply be transferred directly from one country to another (Phillips & Ochs, 2004). Thus, consideration must be given to contextual factors before one simply imports or transplants overseas education models into HK and its specialised context (Rao, 2002).

Generally speaking, when an educational problem or need arises, HK policy makers tend to import educational models from elsewhere to provide solutions (Morris, 2000). A typical approach is to distribute an official circular containing the planned changes in schools and to ask for feedback and comments, although schools normally have had little say or influence in such decisions. However, teachers can decide how they are going to teach and what texts and materials they will use in implementing new approaches. Furthermore, many curriculum innovations are imported directly from Western countries despite the practical realities of local contexts. For example, the Activity Approach (Morris, 2000) characterised by a focus on discovery learning where children learn through manipulating materials was adopted into HK primary schools in the 1980s and was "generally accepted as worthwhile, but had little impact on classrooms" (Morris, 2000, p. 33).

In HK, the early childhood field has borrowed ideas and practices from Western models such as the project approach (Katz, 1994), thematic approach (Shoemaker, 1989), Reggio Emilia (Malaguzzi, 1993), and HighScope (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997). The

focal point of these teaching models is child-centred learning. The learning and teaching approaches implemented in most pre-primary settings in HK, however, focus heavily on children's academic achievement (Chan & Chan, 2003; Ho, 2006; Rao & Li, 2009; Sweeting, 2004). This presents a particular challenge for the implementation of new approaches into HK kindergartens and has provided the motivation for this study. This study investigates curriculum and pedagogical practices in HK kindergartens that use thematic and project approaches. The reasons for choosing these two approaches are as follows: both are imported from Western countries and both are taught in teacher education. Further, both approaches are used widely in HK kindergartens (Cheng, 2008; CDC, 1996). These approaches are defined below along with other key terms used in this study.

1.1 DEFINITIONS

1.1.1 Thematic Approach

The term *thematic approach* is used to describe thematic studies in classrooms as a means to integrate both topics and concepts (Shoemaker, 1989). The thematic approach is defined as "education that is organized in such a way that it cuts across subject matter lines, bringing together various aspects of the curriculum into meaningful association to focus upon areas of study" (Shoemaker, 1989, p. 9). Thematic approaches suggest the integration of various subject areas such as arts, social studies, mathematics and reading.

Teachers provide a program of study, typically known as a "unit" and children have chances to make choices and decisions for their own learning within the scope of the unit (Meinbach, Rothlein & Fredericks, 1995).

1.1.2 Project Approach

The term *project approach* is commonly attributed to Katz and Chard (1989) and the Reggio Emilia schools of Italy (Malaguzzi, 1993). According to Katz and Chard (2000), the goal of a project is that children study a topic through their own explorations and investigation, engaging in an in-depth study of the subject matter. Children can decide the focal point of the chosen topic, what activities they do, and the amount of time spent on each topic. Therefore, there may be multiple projects underway in a classroom on a given day. The study period could last for a few days or weeks, depending on children's interests in the particular topic. Reggio Emilia is a town in northern Italy known internationally for its approach to early childhood education. The pre-schools were co-founded in the 1960s, Loris Malaguzzi (1993) and use projects as part of the curriculum. The Reggio Emilia pre-schools focus on facilitating children's participation in collaborative inquiry with peers and adults (Malaguzzi, 1993).

1.1.3 Pre-primary Education

Pre-primary education is defined as the initial stage of education before primary school for children (CDC, 2006). The term is used in HK to refer to the provision of care

and education for young children under six years of age. In this study, the term *pre-primary* is used interchangeably with the term *pre-school.*

Kindergarten is defined as an institutional school that provides education for 20 or more children during a single day, whether or not all children attend at the same time. Kindergartens are structured in three levels: nursery classes (for children ages 3-4), lower kindergarten (for children ages 4-5), and upper kindergarten (for children ages 5-6). Most of the kindergartens operate on a half-day basis, that is, children attend for three hours in the morning or three hours in the afternoon. Generally speaking, kindergartens are staffed by teachers, head teachers and principals. From 2003, all kindergarten teachers and head teacher are required to possess a Qualified Kindergarten Teacher (QKT) qualification. Kindergarten principals are required to possess the Certificate in Kindergarten Education (Education Bureau, 2012).

1.1.4 Professional Background of the Researcher

I was a kindergarten teacher in HK for 14 years, and am currently working as an early childhood educator at a teacher education institution in HK. These experiences have provided me with opportunities to visit many kindergartens over a long period of time. I became interested in the area of teaching pedagogy when I was observing students' teaching practices during their teaching practicums. I noticed that their ideas about child-centred and play-based approaches differed in practice from what they had been taught in their lectures. My students, who were current kindergarten teachers, seemed not to use

play as their main teaching method and they reported that their use of play for teaching was restricted by constraints which emphasized children's academic learning outcomes. Being familiar with the HK education context, I was intrigued by this situation.

Before I worked as an early childhood educator, I studied my Master of Arts (Early Years) degree in the United Kingdom (UK). The more I became familiar with the range of theoretical tenets and teaching approaches for young children in Western countries, the more I experienced the appeal of transferring Western concepts of Early Childhood Education (ECE), especially child-centred and play-based approaches, into the daily practices of HK pre-primary settings. However, the reality I later observed with my own students challenged me to undertake this study. With the aim of better understanding teachers' teaching practices particularly regarding the implementation of Western education models, and to examine the forces at play in the process.

1.2 A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This study is designed as a result of perceiving the need to examine teaching approaches through practitioners' perspectives, in HK pre-primary settings. ECE in HK has long been undervalued by the HK government (Wong & Rao, 2004). The HK government pays less attention to ECE than other areas of education such as primary and secondary schools (Luk, 2008). A possible way to draw the HK public and government attention to ECE is to expose the current situations of pre-primary settings. To investigate

teachers' view on their teaching approaches is the first step for the investigation. For this reason, I chose a qualitative collective case study approach (Stake, 2005) to collect detailed empirical data from four purposively-selected teachers working in HK kindergartens. In order to gain a better picture of participants from different angles, interviews, observations and field notes were used. After an initial semi-structured interview, classroom observations were undertaken to collect comprehensive view of teachers' classroom practices over a specified period of time. Then, a second semi-structured interview was conducted with each of the four teachers. After completing data collection, the data were coded, categorized, and interpreted. Interview data were collated and presented back to the four teachers for verification to ensure their meanings were accurately recorded.

1.3 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Research is needed in the HK context to investigate existing practices in a clear and coherent manner so that empirical data about specific teaching and learning phenomena can be obtained. Little research has been carried out regarding kindergarten teachers' perspectives on the thematic and project approaches or on the implementation of these two commonly used approaches in HK kindergartens.

In the HK context, an association has been established between teachers' perspectives, teaching and learning (Li, 2004, 2006). Teachers' view about the quality of

pre-school influence children's learning experiences (Rao, Ng, & Pearson, 2010). They affect teacher perspective and judgement and thus affect teaching behaviour in classrooms. Therefore, understanding teachers' perspectives of their teaching approaches is important for improving teaching and learning quality. This study examines teachers' perspectives on their experience with thematic and project approaches and the relationship between teachers' perspectives and their classroom practices. It makes a contribution to early childhood educational research via an investigation of curriculum and pedagogical practices currently being implemented in HK kindergartens. It examines the factors that shape the teaching and learning approaches adopted in these kindergartens. Further, it seeks to identify and describe pedagogical practices that may be distinctive or "hybrid" (Grieshaber, 2006, p. 20) in nature. HK's unique culture, which is significantly shaped by Confucianism (Kim, 2007) and the characteristics of its learners make it essential to consider the appropriateness of various practices for HK specifically, rather than simply following Western styles of teaching and learning.

This study describes a particular innovation that occurred as part of the reforms proposed by the HK Education Commission (2000). Innovation is "a departure from current practice" that involves "novel practices, tools or technologies, and knowledge and ideas" (Cohen & Ball, 2007, p. 2). The study considers curriculum and teaching practices, the adoption of western approaches, and how they cater for Chinese cultural learning needs in the context of HK. According to Ebbeck (2002), who has written extensively

about cultural considerations in the provision of ECE and care, "It is good practice to question what is being done and to continually question it for such practice keeps curricula relevant" (p. 6).

1.4 AIMS OF THE STUDY

This study aims to investigate the current situation with regard to four kindergarten teachers' perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices in HK kindergartens. Specifically, this study aims to:

i) investigate teachers' perspectives on thematic and project approaches;

ii) explore current curriculum and pedagogical practices used in implementing thematic and project approaches;

iii) examine similarities and differences in teachers' perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices when using thematic and project approaches;

iv) identify the factors shaping teachers' perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices; and

v) offer explanations about how curriculum innovations are adopted and implemented in HK.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The overarching question is: 'What are kindergarten teachers' perspectives on

curriculum and pedagogical practices in kindergarten classrooms?' Four subsidiary questions were addressed to answer the main research question:

i) What are teachers' perspectives about thematic and project approaches in four kindergartens rated as "good" by the Hong Kong Education Bureau (HK EDB) (two using a thematic approach and two using a project approach)?

ii) What curriculum and pedagogical practices do teachers use in the two kindergartens adopting a thematic approach and the two kindergartens using a project approach in kindergartens rated as 'good' by the HK EDB?

iii) What are the similarities and differences in teachers' perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices when using thematic and project approaches in the four kindergartens rated as 'good' by the HK EDB?

iv) What factors guide teachers' perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices in the two kindergartens adopting a thematic approach and the two using a project approach, all of which have been rated by the HK EDB as 'good'?

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Specific aspects of ECE appear to be neglected within educational research in HK. In particular, an analysis of the views and perspectives of kindergarten teachers who use project and thematic approaches has not yet been undertaken. Therefore, the findings

from this study could support kindergarten teachers who seek to implement either of these approaches. Second, the study could provide insights into how curriculum innovations are adopted and implemented in HK. Third, the accounts provided by the teachers could help those teachers and others, including teacher educators to reflect on their own teaching experiences, and observations of students, thereby guiding them to further insights. Fourth, policy makers and curriculum developers could benefit from the fine-grained detail provided in this study to better understand decisions about curricula and teaching programs used in HK ECE. Finally, this study addresses the transfer of pedagogic practice between western cultural contexts and the Confucian heritage culture (CHC) of HK. In the west, play is viewed as an important way of learning. In CHC such as Hong Kong, play is often seen as an obstacle to academic development. Yet the Hong Kong government has endorsed the incorporation of play into the pre-primary curriculum. The study is therefore of potential interest beyond HK to other CHC settings and other non-western settings where play is not accorded the same place in early childhood curricula.

1.7 THESIS OVERVIEW

In this first chapter of the thesis, I have introduced this study by examining the challenges of implementing new teaching approaches in HK and by providing relevant background information. Key terms used in the study were defined, and the research problem, aims and significance of the study were detailed.

In Chapter 2, I provide a literature review including historical and contemporary approaches to ECE commonly used worldwide. Pre-primary education in HK kindergartens is described including a review of traditional, thematic, and project approaches. Factors affecting teachers' choices of learning and teaching approaches are presented with a focus on the specific factors at play in HK education contexts. The chapter concludes with a review of the effects of curriculum and pedagogical practices on children's learning.

Chapter 3 introduces the theoretical framework and discusses several theories that guide this study: behaviourism, social learning theory, cognitive constructivism and social constructivism. The chapter discusses how these theories may be integrated with each other, so as to assist in efforts to understand current classroom practices in HK kindergartens.

Chapter 4 first presents the study's methodology. Research questions and the qualitative paradigm utilized in this study are detailed before moving to the overall research design and the justification for employing the design. A rationale for the selection of research sites and teacher participants is provided before shifting the focus to the practicalities of data collection and analysis. To conclude this chapter, research rigour, ethics and study limitations are addressed.

Chapter 5, 6 and 7 present the study's findings and discussion with respect to the environment, routines and activities; teacher-child interactions; and discipline aspects of

the four kindergarten teachers. First, Chapter 5 by defines terms and then examines the four teachers' views on their respective approaches, time allocation, routines and the classroom environment. Next, Chapter 6 introduces the classroom interactions between teachers and children, and describes how teachers used different strategies such as "telling and instructing", "questioning" and "demonstrating" to communicate with children. Then, Chapter 7 presents research findings and discussion specifically on the topic of student discipline. It defines the terms "discipline", "discipline strategy" and "self-help skills". It then reveals major findings in the areas of discipline, children's self-help skills, classroom rules and teachers' discipline strategies.

Chapter 8 concludes with summary and highlights key findings in the three most topical areas uncovered in the study - environment, routine and activities, teacher-child interaction, and student discipline. This chapter offers recommendations in several areas - ensuring play time for kindergarten students; enhancing creative and critical thinking; improving the classroom environment; developing "play lessons" and discussing how the play lessons might be informative for other non-western settings where play does not fit comfortably with early childhood curricula.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In order to convey the context of kindergarten teachers' curriculum and pedagogical practices and the development of pre-primary education in Hong Kong (HK), a range of historical and contemporary approaches to early childhood curriculum and pedagogy are reviewed. I then examine Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), learning through play and teacher-centred approaches. I follow this with an examination of pre-primary education in HK and an exploration of common pedagogical approaches used in HK kindergartens. I then discuss factors affecting teachers' choices of learning and teaching approaches, which is followed by a consideration of research concerning the effects of curriculum and pedagogical practices on children's learning. Figure 2.1 shows the contents of the literature review.

2.1 HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY

Approaches to teaching have changed throughout the years due to a rise in societal expectations and growing awareness about how children learn (Braun & Edwards, 1972; Cohen & Rudolph, 1977). Influential philosophies introduced by theorists such as Dewey,

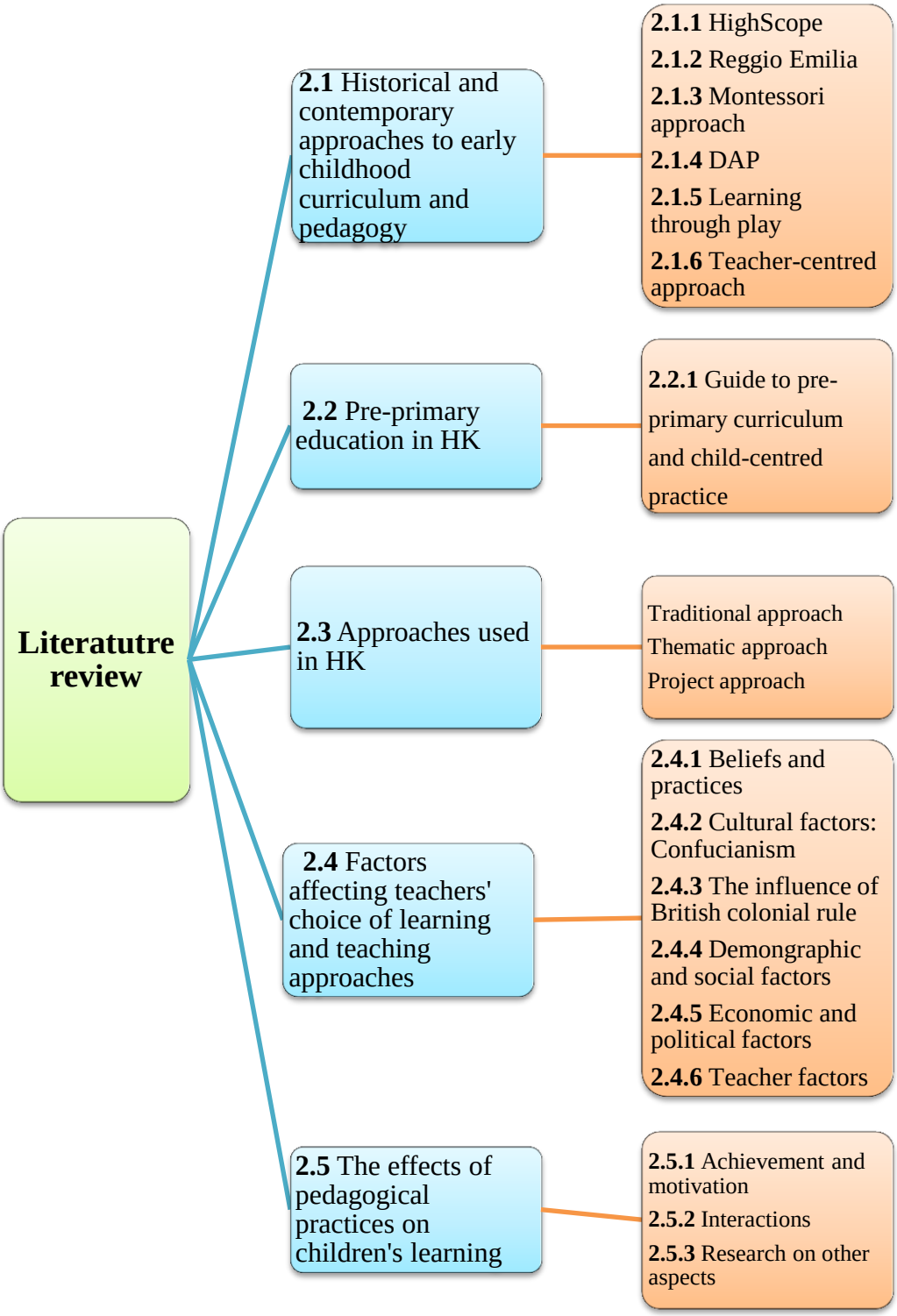

Figure 2.1. Concept map for literature review chapter

Piaget, and Vygotsky are well-known in Early Childhood Education (ECE) in China (Hu &Szente, 2009). Curriculum approaches such as HighScope, Montessori, Reggio Emilia, thematic, and project approaches are adopted in private and public kindergartens (Zhu & Zhang, 2008). This section considers historical and contemporary approaches to early childhood curriculum and pedagogy. It also reviews different curriculum approaches, namely HighScope (Schweinhart & Weikart, 2014), Reggio Emilia (Malaguzzi, 1993) and Montessori Approaches (Torrence & Chattin, 2014), all of which have been adopted in kindergartens in HK. In reviewing these approaches, a general picture of current curriculum and pedagogical practices of HK kindergartens is examined.

2.1.1 HighScope

The HighScope curriculum was first developed by David Weikart and his co-workers in the 1960s for children attending the Ypsilanti Perry Preschool in the United States (US) (Schweinhart & Weikart, 2014). The HighScope approach has had a prime influence on ECE worldwide (Bredekamp, 1996). This approach stresses cognitive understanding, which is required for academic accomplishment in reading and mathematics (DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987; Schweinhart & Weikart, 2014). Based on Piaget's cognitive development theory, HighScope adopts a constructivist teaching approach. It emphasizes children's active learning, which is based on children's interests and key experiences (Henniger, 2005). The major mission of HighScope teachers is to act

as observers, listeners, and active environment creators; they encourage children's active participation in events, with materials, and in constructing knowledge themselves (Blackwell, 1994). In the HighScope curriculum, children's daily activities are arranged in a "Plan-Do-Review" sequence (Brown, 1991; Weikart & Schweinhart, 2009). In the time allocated to "Plan," children are encouraged to express their opinions to others and to make a plan based on their own decisions. In the time allocated to "Do," children carry out their plan, explore learning materials and practice skills. The HighScope teachers mainly observe how children collect information, and how they communicate and solve problems with their peers (Weikart & Schweinhart, 2009). Teachers can become involved in children's activities at the appropriate time, joining the discussion and creating a problem-solving environment for the children. In the "Review" time, children have opportunities to describe their experiences and reflect on what they have learned in different ways (Weikart & Schweinhart, 2009). HighScope teachers evaluate children's progress by recording their behaviours and their talk, taking notes, and keeping a portfolio. Teachers typically use a "HighScope Child Observation Record" to observe and evaluate children's progress in "six domains of development: i) initiative; ii) social relations; iii) creative representation; iv) music and movement; v) language and literacy, and vi) logic and mathematics" (Weikart & Schweinhart, 2009, p. 198).

Within the HighScope approach, it is important for teachers to keep track of

children's learning so as to measure and record children's learning outcomes. According to the HighScope Education Research Association (2003), the Child Observation Record (COR) can be used flexibly and its application is beneficial for recording and detailing essential developmental milestones in children's lives. The statistical characteristics of the COR were measured with data collected by Head Start teachers in 2003 with factor analysis data confirming positive internal and external validity of the COR (HighScope Educational Research Association, 2003).

2.1.2 Reggio Emilia

Reggio Emilia is a town in northern Italy. Loris Malaguzzi (1920-1994), who was a philosopher-journalist, co-founded the preschools in Reggio Emilia, with women who were committed to education, and principles of social justice. The Reggio Emilia Approach is based on the theories of Dewey, Vygotsky, Piaget, and Bruner (Gandini, 1993).This specific educational approach involved the whole community in the region of Reggio Emilia including parents, educators and other community members. The approach extended parental cooperation to also include community cooperation in Italy at a time when collaborative social approaches were fostered nationally (Edwards, 2002). The role of teachers is to act as facilitators, co-learners, reflective practitioners, and researchers (Gandini, 1993). The early childhood settings are seen as centres of exchange and connection among children, teachers, and families (Gandini, 1993), therefore,

teachers make use of parents and community resources. Teachers working in Reggio Emilia settings value children's abilities, initiative, and potential to pursue goodness and beauty, and give children choices of different activities (Malaguzzi, 1993). The approach emphasizes the mutual growth of teachers and children. Teachers see themselves as learners when working with children, parents, and other teachers (Brewer, 2007). Theory and practice are inseparable and teachers are accountable for their pedagogical decisions (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006).

According to Lewin-Benham (2005), the Reggio Emilia Approach has four characteristics. First, emergent curriculum and project approaches characterise teaching. Curricula are not pre-planned by teachers, but gradually develop into projects according to the interactions between children and teachers. The second characteristic is a diversified expression system of visual arts wherein children make use of different visual media to explore topics. They use iconic language to make predictions and hypotheses, and express thoughts. They use observation skills in various ways. Third is a strong emphasis on documentation. Documentation here refers to photos, pictures, maps, video and audio tapes, and other media that depict children while they investigate topics. Documents show examples of children's learning processes and make children's learning visible. Through discussion and exchange of information and views, teachers are able to evaluate their teaching practices and advance their professional knowledge and capacity.

The concept of documentation is one of the major contributions of the Reggio Emilia approach to ECE, it helps teachers to gain insights to plan and evaluate curriculum decisions (Oken-Wright, 2001). The fourth characteristic is emphasis on cooperation. The Reggio Emilia approach emphasizes interpersonal interaction and mutual relationships. In the Reggio Emilia preschool system, mutual relationships include teacher-teacher relations, teacher-child relations, cooperative relations between scholars and teachers, peer relations, parental participation, and school-community relations and relationships with the physical environment (Edwards, 2002).

In HK where kindergartens are privately run there are a small minority of kindergartens using a Reggio Emilia approach (Li, 2004). Some schools have chosen to adopt some, but not all, characteristics of this approach, such as project work and documentation (Chan, 2009). The child-centred philosophy of Reggio Emilia has changed some HK teachers' traditional thinking about teaching (Ma, 2001) and that they started to appreciate that children are active inventors of their own knowledge.

2.1.3 Montessori Approach

The Montessori Approach refers to educational activities that are informed by the pedagogical thinking of Maria Montessori (1870-1952), the first woman to qualify as a doctor in Italy. She suggested that the teaching environment must be carefully prepared for children (Torrence & Chattin-McNichols, 2014). She stressed reality and naturalness,

as she believed that these characteristics in learning environments helped to develop children's self-discipline and spontaneity in real and natural situations. Montessori teachers, therefore, act as a bridge between the environment and children (Torrence & Chattin-McNichols, 2009). The teachers' role is to demonstrate the correct methods for using Montessori teaching materials and convey the rules for their use. Teachers do not interfere when children play with the materials for the first time, no matter how well or badly they perform. Apart from the teachers' dedicated roles, the Montessori approach is characterized by specially designed teaching materials, mixed- age groups, and opportunities for children to play, practice, design, and transform the materials. These practices are believed to enhance children's imagination and thinking skills. Children are provided with sufficient time and space to select and manipulate the teaching materials during activities.

The key characteristics of the Montessori Approach remain relevant today and are evident in many early childhood classrooms. These include individualised and child-centred learning, multi-age groupings, holistic education, teachers serving as observers and guides, and hands-on manipulative activities (Torrence & Chattin-McNichols, 2009). According to Henniger (2005), one of the greatest contributions to ECE made by Montessori is the use of hands-on manipulative materials with specific features such as self-correcting aspects, graduated difficulty and complexity, and the sensory orientation

of learning materials (Henniger, 2005).

The Montessori approach has been employed as a teaching approach in many countries including HK and mainland China, although teachers' use of it has raised criticism. In HK, a few kindergartens claim that they use a Montessori approach. According to Chan (2009), an early childhood educator and researcher in HK, some kindergartens make their commitment to the Montessori approach clear in their centres' titles (e.g. Montessori Kindergarten), while others merely announce, in promotional materials, that they adopt Montessori education principles. Elsewhere, Cheng (2006) suggested that some HK kindergarten teachers are inclined to copy the physical features of the Montessori approach, such as the use of manipulative materials and tools, but ignore the "learning quality of the children" (p. 233). That is, according to Cheng and other scholars, teachers in HK "have only a superficial knowledge" of a Montessori program (Chan, 2009, p. 102). As Li (2004) elaborates, "the [Montessori] approaches used appear to make little difference in practice in some of the kindergartens when they are used as the means of transmitting knowledge of reading, writing, and mathematics" (Li, 2004, p. 334). In China, Huo and Qi (2008) commented that the Montessori approach has provided opportunities for children to practice their thinking skills and personal judgment. According to these researchers, many Montessori teachers in China claim that they have been trained for this approach, but this was generally limited to three to five

days of specialised training. With such a short period of training, Huo and Qi (2008) doubt whether an accurate representation of a Montessori approach is possible.

This brief review of three key teaching approaches, HighScope, Reggio Emilia, and Montessori provides a general description of the key characteristics of the approaches and provides a sense of their uptake and use, thus highlighting the shifting values and viewpoints toward ECE in different contexts, including in HK. These approaches have contributed to the foundation of contemporary ECE by widening understanding of the principles and progression of how young children learn. Specifically, they have guided teachers in educational practices by accentuating important aspects considered as foundational in ECE such as play, cooperation, independence, learning by doing, parental involvement, and concern for each individual child.

Hu and Szente (2009) however remarked that curricula such as Reggio Emilia and Montessori may be ineffective when executed in the Chinese cultural context because most parents expect an academically-oriented curriculum. These concerns highlight the complexities innocent in adopting foreign philosophies and curricula (DAP) into HK kindergartens. Local cultural issues have to be taken into consideration (Jiang & Deng, 2008).

2.1.4 **Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)**

While the previous section introduced historical and contemporary curriculum approaches, this section concentrates on DAP as a powerful overarching ideology in ECE. Developmentally Appropriate Practice initially emerged in the US in 1986 when a position statement on DAP was first adopted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). The most recent version of the statement, introduced in 2009, declared an aim to offer "a framework for best practice" for ECE programs (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 1). According to DAP authors Copple and Bredekamp (2009), the statement recommended "five key areas of practice: i) creating a caring community of learners, ii) teaching to enhance development and learning, iii) planning curriculum to achieve important goals, iv) assessing children's development and learning, and v) establishing reciprocal relationships with families" (p. 16). In essence, DAP promotes the use of child-initiated activities, autonomy and self-regulation, and interaction between children and peers, and between children and adults. That is, within DAP, children should have plenty of opportunities to explore and experiment with concrete materials and to interact with adults and peers (Wood & Attfield, 2005). Teachers in a DAP classroom are seen as peers who ask questions, probe and offer advice and information for the children when needed. It is fundamental that teachers respond to every child individually (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) emphasises the development of the whole child (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). It suggests that children are born with curiosity and are keen to explore their environment and learn through discovery (Richardson, 2003). It merges the work of Piaget and Vygotsky with the concept of constructivism, "which assumes that learners construct their own knowledge based on interactions with their environment that challenge their thinking" (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006, p. 66). Under this tenet, curriculum and pedagogical approaches should be determined by the readiness, ongoing needs, and interests of the children (Li, 2006). Teachers should be responsible for "classroom plans and organization, sensitivity and responsiveness to all the children, and moment to moment interactions with them that have the greatest impact on children's development and learning" (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 8).

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) is recognised by most HK kindergarten teachers as an effective contemporary curriculum framework (Ho, 2008). However, Ho (2008) points out that although HK preschool settings reflect the basic pedagogical principles in DAP, the views and opinions of both parents and teachers on program quality are "somewhat different from the developmentally appropriate quality indicators" (p. 24). As Li (2003) explained, kindergarten teachers in HK tend to concentrate on their own teaching practices rather than focus on their students' learning

needs, meaning that DAP are not well interpreted by HK kindergarten teachers. In short, a gap exists between the theories or approaches espoused by early childhood educators and what they put into practice in their actual teaching (Li, 2003). This is important in the context of this study as the research methods used must be able to capture this type of gulf adequately.

2.1.5 Learning through Play

This section introduces the idea of learning through play and how such ideas are implemented in HK pre-school settings. The advantage of play has long been mentioned in curriculum policy documents such as the HK *Guide* (CDC, 2006). Play provides children with experiences that support social, cognitive, and language development and creativity (Wu, 2014). Through play, children have opportunities to interact with peers. Such casual interactions may promote social competence behaviours, which are necessary for later learning. Play also allows children to apply and use the skills and knowledge they have already acquired. Practicing skills such as self-help skills allows children to master these skills and feel competent (Klein, Worth, & Linas, 2004). For example, a child who may not be able to pour milk into a cup can practice using a toy cup and jug. According to Klein et al. (2004), the feeling of competence promotes a child's self-efficacy. An environment which is playful and stimulating can facilitate children's higher level thinking (Klein et al., 2004). According to Vygotsky (1976), children's play can

support the highest level of development. The idea of learning through play is highly valued by scholars and educators. However, in most HK kindergartens, children have no particular time assigned to free-play (Wu, 2014). Children can have free-play time only when they have finished assigned tasks (Li, 2004; Wu, 2014) such as homework (see Section 2.1.6) and other activities. Free-play therefore depends on how quickly the children finish their assignments (Li, 2004; Wu, 2014). Children who are slower in finishing their tasks have less or no time to play.

Generally speaking, children in HK kindergartens spend free-play time in different learning areas such as book, doll, and toy corners. According to Landry (2005), the arrangement of the classroom environment, which includes learning corners, might influence children's behaviours. Thus, the types of materials provided in learning corners requires careful consideration (Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2003). Teachers arrange different materials to be selected by the children in the learning corners. Through play, children can make choices, and enhance their social skills, and so on. According to Almon (2003), children who involve themselves in child-initiated play may have longer concentration spans in learning. On the contrary, didactic classrooms, in which there is little or no play, possibly produce less learning (Miller & Almon, 2009). Accordingly, Almon (2003) asserted that children should be involved in self-initiated play through which they can explore their creativity.

Elsewhere, Gaskin, Haight, and Lancy (2007) suggested that play is a cultural activity, which reflects a society's values and can be used as a way to transfer values to the younger generation. Accordingly, children's play activities may vary in different places. For example, American parents tend to accept play-based curriculum in schools (Wang, Elicker, McMullen, & Mao, 2008) whereas Asian parents expect children to learn academic skills rather than engage in play in schools (Fung, 2009). In a study of practical and conceptual aspects of children's play in HK and German kindergartens Wu (2014) found that German teachers associated play with the best learning methods, while none of the Chinese teachers linked play with learning. The Chinese teachers in Wu's (2014) study thought that playing and learning were detached and that children needed to acquire knowledge at kindergarten. Another HK study conducted by Cheng and Stimpson (2004) revealed similar results; they found that HK teachers retained a dichotomized idea of play and learning.

While studies by Cheng and Stimpson (2004), Wang et al. (2008) and Wu (2014) in HK point out that teachers viewed play as different from learning, the HK *Guide* (CDC, 2006) recommends play-based learning in HK kindergartens. In practice, however, Wu (2014) suggests that teachers in HK kindergartens highlight the mastery of pre-academic skills such as reading and writing. According to Waters-Adams (2006), teachers' beliefs are related to their teaching strategies, decision making, and interactions with their

students. As Howard (2010) explained, teachers' decisions about using play as a teaching method might depend on how they perceive the notion of learning through play. Such perceptions, therefore could either be barriers or facilitators to the greater use of play-oriented practices (Wu, 2014).

In a study by Rao and Li (2009), the researchers looked at play in the context of ECE in Mainland China. Four children who attended full-day programmes were observed and videotaped from the start to the end of a typical school day. The researchers concluded that "eduplay" is "an appropriate term to conceptualise teacher practices in Chinese preschools" (Rao & Li, 2009, p. 113). As explained by Rao and Li (2009), eduplay, which is known as "playing to learn," is a type of play-based education with "Chinese characteristics" (p. 113). In HK, Leung (2011) used the concept of "eduplay" to conduct a study in three HK kindergartens. Teachers in the study completed a checklist for participating children before and after 10 eduplay sessions to evaluate children's social competence. After 10 eduplay sessions, Leung (2011) found that children's social competence was significantly improved. Thus, the researcher recommended that eduplay may be applied to the teaching of problem solving skills and children's social competence might be enhanced through their use of problem solving skills in everyday situations.

2.1.6 Teacher-centred Approaches

Given that this study investigates curriculum and pedagogical practices in

four kindergartens, this section discusses a teacher-centred approach, which is a commonly used teaching method in HK schools including kindergartens. A teacher-centred or didactic approach is adult-centred in that teachers make classroom decisions and initiate classroom activities. Both the curriculum and the learning environments within teacher-centred approaches are highly structured and teacher-dominated (Vighnarajah, Wong, & Baker, 2008). The teachers determine what and how to teach and how learning will occur in the classroom, concentrating on "lectures, drill and practice, and workbook/sheet activities" (Lee, Baik, & Charlesworth, 2006, p. 936). Children's responsibilities are to respond and carry out teachers' requests and instructions. Teachers do not get involved in children's activities, as they take a supervisory role (Lee et al., 2006). With regard to teaching content, emphasis is put on pre-academic skills with explicit instruction to children, who work towards clearly defined education objectives (Weikart, 2000). Children are taught the basics of literacy and numeracy using rote learning strategies such as memorization and group drills. Direct instruction from the teacher to the children is seen to result in learning, which is often defined as children memorizing what they have been told (Vighnarajah et al., 2008). A teacher-centred approach has its roots in behaviourist theories of learning, which suggests that individuals learn through repeated responses to stimuli (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006).

Applied to classroom contexts, behaviourism assures children repeat appropriate

responses to teachers' stimuli, such as questioning or the provision of exercises. Teachers adopting a behaviourist approach are keen to correct children's inappropriate behaviours as soon as they make mistakes to avoid children learning incorrect responses (Stipek, 1993). Such teaching methods have been criticized by Bruner (1996), who argued that behaviourist approaches are not easy for children to grasp, and may promote shallow learning. When teachers are too "dominant" in their way of teaching, it may "trigger tension and conflict in a group" (Vighnarajah et al., 2008, p. 38). As a result, the HK government intended to intervene as a counterpoint to these effects by recommending teachers "go beyond behaviouristic perceptions and lead away from the teacher-directed approach" (Fung & Lee, 2008, p. 35). This HK education reform initiative proposes to follow the idea of constructivism, in which children are free to explore and construct their own knowledge (Fung & Lee, 2008; Fung & Lam, 2012).

On balance, however, teacher-centred approaches are not without advantages. They have been shown to enhance children's skills in pre-academic areas, although the results are described as short-term (Miller & Bizzell, 1983). Karnes, Schwedel, and Williams (1983) studied the influence of five approaches, including traditional, Montessori, and direct instruction, on children's academic achievements in both the short and long term. Children from the direct instruction group were the most successful in the early stages of school. A longer-term follow-up study by Karnes and others (1983), however, showed

that the Montessori group and the direct instruction group achieved the highest and lowest proportion of high school graduates respectively. The value of a teacher-centred approach is that it could enhance children's motivation to learn as the approach creates a sense of togetherness and connectedness to peers in the class (Hoffman, 2000). In other words, it creates a sense of belonging "and an egalitarian atmosphere rather than one that is fragmented through the use of ability groups, pursuit of separate and individual activities, and differential attention to individuals and groups on the part of the teacher" (Hoffman, 2000, p. 198).

Although a teacher-centred approach is considered as developmentally inappropriate from a purely DAP perspective, it is commonly adopted in HK kindergartens, as many parents and teachers tend to value teacher-centred approaches (Fung & Lam, 2012). In a local study, Lau (1997) revealed that HK kindergarten teachers were inclined to be in charge of children's learning and they emphasized a quiet classroom in which children are obedient and respectful to the teachers. Teacher-centred approaches in HK kindergartens are influenced by the low teacher-student ratio, and the large amounts of time teachers spend on formal academic tasks such as lesson planning and preparation, as well as marking exams, tests, and homework (Cheuk & Hatch, 2007; Opper, 1996). Children are required to do homework at school so that teachers can make sure they know how to do the required homework of the day. They are expected to

complete one or two examples of the required homework and to finish the rest at home by the next school day. In addition, when doing homework at kindergarten, children have to sit still and straight, be quiet and pay attention to what and how to write correctly. Reasons for adopting a teacher-centred approach in HK will be further discussed later in this chapter.

2.2 PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION IN HK

In this section, I provide a general picture of pre-primary education in HK, starting with a government publication, the *Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum (CDC, 2006; CDI, 1996)*, which introduces the government's suggestions concerning pre-primary education in HK. I also describe child-centred practice in HK and in western contexts. Further, I review three commonly used teaching approaches (traditional, thematic and project) in HK and other countries.

2.2.1 Guide to Pre-primary Curriculum and the Child-centred Practice

In the mid-1990s, the HK government issued to all kindergartens the *Guide* (CDI, 1996), which suggested that the early childhood curriculum should assist children's all-round development. It recommended that teachers adopt a thematic approach. According to Shoemaker (1989), a thematic approach views "learning and teaching in a holistic way and reflects the real world, which is interactive" (p. 5). The second edition of the *Guide*

*(*CDC, 2006), published ten years after the first, strongly emphasised the use of child-centred learning strategies, reflecting a global and local transformation of pre-primary education policies. Against this backdrop, the *Guide* (CDC, 2006) recommended teachers should:

i) be caring, accepting, and display open manners toward children, encourage children to express their views, ask questions when in doubt and express their feelings when needed;

ii) ask open-ended questions and provide clear instructions to help children understand the learning activities. Teachers may use different types of body language such as smiles, nods and eye contact to communicate with children;

iii) prepare rich and relevant teaching materials and environments for the children to explore and use them as a catalyst for children to interact with each other;

iv) have an optimistic attitude and relaxed manner so as to create an enjoyable and stress-free learning atmosphere for the children; and

v) maintain motivation for the children to learn by changing classroom settings and decorations according to the curriculum requirements

(CDC, 2006, p. 44-51).

These prescriptive details about teachers' dispositions towards children, and toward learning and teaching, seem to have resulted in many kindergartens in HK starting to adopt more child-centred curricula and teaching methods (Pearson & Rao, 2006). Child-centred curricula and teaching methods are characteristic of both thematic and project approaches.

In terms of prevalence, a thematic approach is the major teaching approach used in HK kindergartens, whilst some kindergartens use a project approach as their main teaching approach (Cheng, 2008). Interestingly, as Ma (2001) found, some kindergartens claim that they adopt the project approach inconsistently, using it only at specific times or months during the year. There are two possible reasons for this, one being that teachers are not familiar with the established principles for applying the project approach (Li, 2005; Ma, 2001). Another possibility is that teachers cannot afford the large amount of time necessary for the project approach, especially when they are under pressure to cover academic aspects of the curriculum (Ma, 2001).

Generally speaking, most kindergartens in HK are academically oriented (Chan, 2012; Chan & Chan, 2003; Ho, 2006; Li, 2004; Opper, 1992; Rao & Li, 2009), teaching Chinese, English, and numeracy as part of the core curriculum. The curriculum focuses on children learning academic skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic. Children as

young as four years of age are required to do homework, and in most cases take dictation and examinations to measure their learning. In his landmark text on the topic of education in HK, Sweeting (2004) suggested that HK kindergartens offered young children "a curriculum that is too advanced for their age" (p. 606). Along similar lines, Opper (1996) previously offered serious criticism of pedagogical practices in HK kindergartens by stating "if one of the aims of ECE is to promote the healthy, all-round development of young children, then HK kindergartens are not altogether successful" (p. 138). It seems that kindergarten teachers are falling behind the vision of contemporary ECE. In their defences, Ho (2010) argued, teachers have received minimal and inappropriate professional training and that this lack may affect teachers' practices and their use of teaching strategies. By the same token, Li (2004) wondered why "kindergarten teachers in HK are frequently blamed for not putting ECE theories into practice, though they are regularly exposed to them when they go through teacher education course(s)" (p. 24).

In response to these assertions, many kindergarten teachers vigorously defend what and how they teach. How they teach is strongly affected by parents, who influence school management and policy-making processes by choosing particular types of kindergartens for their children, thereby expressing their consumer preferences for particular types of curriculum (Ho, 2008; Rao et al., 2010). Indeed, research suggests that kindergarten teachers consider that they are under pressure to offer the kind of preschool education

desired by parents (Li, 2005; Li & Rao, 2005; Rao & Li, 2009), whose "expectations are largely oriented towards academic achievement" (Li, 2004, p. 335). Most Chinese parents have high expectations of their children (Chan, 2012; Opper, 1992; Sweeting, 2004). According to educators and researchers Rao and colleagues (2003), in HK "education is regarded as the path to success and financial gain" (p. 334). The popular assumption is that the early years are the time to train young children, and that the earlier the child goes to school the sooner he or she will be better at reading and writing (Rao et al., 2010). Kindergartens are expected to equip young children for primary schooling in an exam-oriented educational system (Ho, 2006; Rao et al., 2010). Adding to the complexity of the situation, Chan and Chan (2002) argued that kindergarten practitioners in HK are in search of a unique pedagogy that best fits in the local context in HK.

According to Jacobson (2003), kindergartens are like a bridge between pre-schools and formal education. Although pre-schools do not fit into primary schooling, they act as a bridge between the two stages of learning for many children, who have diverse experiences. Simply put, preschools are a point of transition. In Western contexts, Alexander and Entwisle (1988) suggested that a successful transition from kindergarten to primary school might improve children's levels of social competency and academic achievement in primary school. This was echoed by Chan (2012), in an Eastern context who argued that transition to primary school is one of the key events in early childhood

and that this transactional process "involves interaction with children's peer groups, families, teachers and schools, and even with the community as a whole" (p. 640).

Early relationships are essential for young children as these set the stage for upcoming relationships in school (Howes & Sanders, 2006). In fact, teacher-child relationships and interactions have been recognised by some researchers as vital supports for children's social and cognitive development in classrooms (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Lambert, Bbott-Shim, & Sibley, 2006; O'Connor & McCartney, 2007). Apart from teacher-child interactions, which are an important aspect in defining the value of a program, Howes and Sanders (2006) explain that child-child interactions are equally important as children can learn from their peers by observing and modelling their behaviours and, above all, responding to their expressions. Nevertheless, children might have different responses when interacting and building relationships with other people (Howes & Sanders, 2006). While some children may feel relaxed, others may feel tense when communicating with teachers and peers. In order to support children's learning and development, teachers have the responsibility to create a positive and supportive classroom environment (Pianta & Walsh, 1996).

Pre-primary education in HK has been discussed in broad terms, concentrating on the curriculum, teacher qualification, current pedagogical practices and possible reasons for the development of specific learning and teaching practices in HK kindergartens. A

general picture of the field of ECE in HK given; and next the focus is narrower on three approaches– traditional, thematic, and project approaches.

2.3 APPROACHES (TRADITIONAL, THEMATIC AND PROJECT APPROACHES) USED IN HK KINDERGARTENS

In HK, kindergartens have adopted a variety of pedagogical approaches, among which three are most commonly used and frequently documented (Opper, 1992; Chan, 2009). They are the traditional, thematic, and project approaches. The first group of pedagogical approaches are said to be *traditional* approaches. The typical method of traditional teaching is a process wherein teachers transmit prearranged knowledge to children. Learning is evaluated through tests and examinations on the extent of knowledge children have acquired and can maintain. In most cases, traditional teachers use the blackboard to explain related topics and concepts to children and ask them to copy this material. From a traditional point of view, children are passive recipients of knowledge (Ng & Rao, 2008). Individual children, questions, views, or culture have little value. The main task of a traditional approach is to deliver the defined scope and progression of standardized curricula. It is basically a ‘one size fits all’ approach (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992).

In traditional approaches, teachers plan all the learning content, and provide

detailed information and facts for children. Teachers can readily provide teaching objectives, plans, content, and activities should parents request them. However, Ng and Rao (2008) stated that a traditional approach is not effective for children's learning, as it ignores experiential learning which is essential for children. In fact, traditional approaches have been criticized by many early childhood educators in HK (Cheng & Stimpson, 2004; Ho, 2006; Opper, 1996). According to Yeung (2009), "students in HK still tend to be traditional learners who rarely experience and gain from real student-centred learning" (p. 1).

The second type of approach is thematic. The terms thematic, thematic instruction, thematic teaching, interdisciplinary thematic instruction, integrated curriculum, and integrated studies are used interchangeably to refer to thematic approaches (Czerniak, Weber, Sandmann, & Adhern, 1999; Roberts & Kellough, 2004). Thematic approaches are based on Bruner's concept of a spiral curriculum in which the information is strengthened and solidified each time the student revisits the subject matter (Czerniak et al., 1999). The term thematic is used to signal curriculum integration (Shoemaker, 1989). Integrated curriculum is considered to help students to have deeper understandings and connections among concepts (Beane, 1997; Roberts & Kellough, 2004). Based on research from the field of cognitive science suggesting that people handle information by forming connections and patterns (Beane, 1997), thematic approaches facilitate the

development of comprehensive networks of interrelated information as children study different subjects related to a central theme. Moreover, the NAEYC affirmed that curricula should be integrated such that learning takes place primarily through play and that curricula should be consistent with children's existing interests and ideas (Bredekamp, 1987).

According to Shoemaker (1989), thematic approaches typically have the following features. Thematic approaches:

i) connect children's everyday life to daily activities.

ii) provide different opportunities and experiences to cater for children's individual needs.

iii) base teaching and learning on children's interests, and children are encouraged to work together in order to create a sense of community.

In addition, teachers use different materials, activities, and techniques to help children to make connections among different content areas such as language, mathematics, cultures and environments. A teaching plan is created around a concept or theme (Shoemaker, 1989).

The aims of thematic approaches are to assist children to attain skills and knowledge in different areas and to enhance positive attitudes. Thematic approaches

concentrate on the holistic study of an area, and children are expected to learn basic subjects through participating in activities which are based on a theme. As Roberts and Kellough (2004) stated, "meaningful learning then is defined as learning that results when the learner makes connections between a new experience, prior knowledge, and experiences that were stored in his or her long-term memory" (p. 3). In so doing children can see how and why the skills are useful to them and thus have enhanced motivation and interest in learning. As discussed earlier, the *Guide* (CDC, 2006; CDI, 1996), recommended that kindergartens in HK use a thematic approach to teaching.

The third approach is the *project approach*. The project approach is an in-depth study of a topic (Katz & Chard, 2000), which promotes children's development in different areas. The project topic or idea can be suggested by the children or teacher. According to Katz (1994), "the key feature of a project is that it is a research effort deliberately focused on finding answers to questions about a topic" (p. 1). The project approach can be an example of lively, engaging, meaningful, and developmentally appropriate learning (Katz & Chard, 1989). A project investigation can last for a few days or weeks, depending on children's interests. Children can decide the project's focal point, actions, activities, and the amount of time spent on different areas. The project is closely related to their lives and experiences, and children can work as a whole class or in small groups. Project activities can include group discussion, investigation, role-play, site visits,

guest speakers, product display, and sharing (Driscoll & Nagel, 2005). The Project approach is more playful and less academic than traditional approaches (Warner and Sower, 2005). It has "additional opportunities for the growth of knowledge, skills, and dispositions when children ask their own questions, conduct their own investigations and make decisions about their projects" (Helm & Katz, 2001, p. 2). As children plan project work and carry it out, the processes facilitate children's thinking, problem-solving, and social-negotiation skills (Katz & Chard, 2000).

The project approach has five structural features: i) discussion, ii) fieldwork, iii) representation, iv) investigation, and v) display (Katz & Chard, 2000). As discussed earlier in this chapter, throughout the project, children continually take part in discussion, fieldwork, and investigation. At the end of the project, they illustrate their work products and give details about special issues related to their project work. According to Katz and Chard (2000), the implementation of a project has three phases. Phase 1 is the beginning of the project. Children discuss the topic with their teacher, which is based on children's experiences and interests. All through the discussions, teachers help children to develop questions which could be answered in the course of their own investigations. The teacher creates a web, which is a kind of interlinked diagram showing children's topics of interest, methods, and preparations to carry out the investigations. Phase 2 is based on discussions, collected information, and materials for the project. Children's work includes field work,

searching reference books, interviews with related persons, and so on. Children are enabled to do things according to their own pace, interests, needs, and abilities. Phase 3 is reviewing time, when children get together to review and evaluate the whole project and share their newly found knowledge or products by giving story, art, or drama presentations. The project approach stresses the use of documentation as an authentic process for assessing children's learning (Helm, Beneke, & Steinheimer, 1998), permitting teachers and parents to evaluate children's progress and development in order to continually create a better learning environment for the children.

The project approach has captured the attention of early childhood educators in HK. In 1992 and 1998, the Education Department of the HK government published two booklets, *The Project Approach* (Kindergarten Section, 1998a) and *The Project Approach - HK Experience* (Kindergarten Section, 1998b) to promote the use of the approach. The latter booklet contains reflections of teachers who have tried the project approach. Different issues were raised about the distribution of resources, teaching strategies, classroom discipline, means of motivating children, assessment, roles of parents, and how to involve parents. The booklet concluded that teachers agreed the project approach was beneficial, but that success depended on teachers' instructional methods, that is, their pedagogical practices. While teachers' thinking and views about teaching approaches may affect how they use them in the classrooms, teachers' actual implementation of the

teaching approaches are crucial as it affects children's learning in general. For example, how teachers prepare materials for children in learning corners affects children's creative and problem solving skills. This is important in the context of the present study which investigates the implementation of curriculum and pedagogical practices in four kindergarten classrooms in HK.

Teachers' curriculum and pedagogical practices are heavily influenced by government policy. In the two versions of the *Guide*, the CDC (2006) and the CDI (1996) viewed the project approach as a child-centred approach and encouraged its adoption by kindergartens. In the first version, published in 1996, but not again in the subsequent version published in 2006, the HK CDC wrote that the theoretical bares for thematic approaches is similar to that of the project approach. At the same time, the CDC (2006) highlighted the distinctive features of the project approach: "by stating that it placed "greater emphasis on the initiative of children to explore and discover by themselves during the learning process" (CDI, 1996, p.162). That is, what distinguishes the project approach is that it is focused on children's interests. Children are able to initiate their own learning through investigations, questions, and problem solving. The project approach promotes the use of appropriate environments in which children can investigate with each other. Alternatively, teachers using thematic approaches plan and conduct learning activities based on their knowledge of children's interests and abilities. Their instructions

are systematic and purposeful. Teachers have preordained plans of what to teach in different themes.

Central to these approaches, however, is the assumption that, when making curriculum decisions, teachers need to encourage children to participate in the planning process and to regulate the learning activities according to children's interests and concerns. The successes of traditional, thematic, and project approaches "lie in teachers and children's power to make decisions of the program, and to what extent teachers have planned for program implementation" (Liu, 2003, p. 122).

In this section, three frequently used teaching approaches in HK kindergartens were introduced. The traditional, thematic, and project approaches were reviewed. I described the characteristics of the three approaches, current practices, and the influences in adopting these approaches in HK kindergartens. I now turn to the factors affecting the choice of learning and teaching approaches.

2.4 FACTORS AFFECTING TEACHERS' CHOICE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING APPROACHES

The factors that influence curriculum and pedagogical practices in HK ECE include teachers' beliefs and practices; cultural factors (e.g. the influence of Confucian ideology on classroom discipline and rules, creativity, critical thinking and problem solving); the

influence of British colonial rule; demographic and social factors; economic and political factors (e.g. the influence of parents and government policies on curriculum); and teacher factors (e.g. the influence of teacher training and perspectives on children's learning). Each of these factors will be discussed in turn.

2.4.1 Beliefs and Practices

Teachers' beliefs and practices are among the most important factors that contribute to teachers' pedagogical decisions in classrooms. In particular, cultural beliefs may affect teachers' choices of teaching approaches.

A comparative study of preschool education that employed ethnographic methods in China, Japan, and the US demonstrates how preschools both reflected and shaped values of child-rearing and early-childhood education, and larger social patterns and beliefs (Tobin, Wu, and Davidson, 1989). This study also offers an interesting depiction of the reasons members of a society have for developing different kinds of preschool programs. According to Tobin et al. (1989), helping children develop language skills is considered a fundamental task of preschools in China, Japan, and the US. In China and Japan, a preschool is viewed as a mechanism for expressing group harmony and shared social intention rather than for self-expression. Preschool teachers in China habitually correct children's incorrect pronunciation and vocabulary usage. Likewise, preschool teachers in Japan repeatedly guide formal group presentations although they rarely correct

children's informal speech. In contrast, US preschool teachers view language as the solution to promoting individuality, independence, problem solving, companionship, and cognitive development in children (Tobin et al., 1989). In the US, teachers use a generous amount of time working with children separately, teaching them how to express their personal feelings and beliefs (Tobin et al., 1989). It seems that teachers' beliefs about children and the ways in which they learn and grow affect the decisions that they make about programs and the choice of teaching approaches (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2009).

According to Tobin and colleagues (1989), teachers' curriculum and pedagogical practices may change according to shifts in their beliefs. The follow-up study conducted by Tobin, Hsueh, and Karasawa (2009) which revisited the same preschools in China, Japan, and US 20 years after the original study revealed transformations in all the participating preschools. The authors argued, "We [the authors] cannot say that they [China, Japan and US] have become better or worse, just that they each now, as a generation ago, reflect their culture, their society, and their time" (Tobin et al., 2009, p. 247). That is to say, teachers' choices of curriculum and pedagogical practices in their classrooms may change in response to changing social and cultural beliefs about how children learn and grow.

Research indicates that teaching beliefs are likely to be "part of subjective knowledge, concepts, and attitudes" (Tzuo, Tan, & Yang, 2013, p. 247) and teachers may

act differently in classrooms in contrast to what they claim to believe. A group of 34 kindergarten teachers was interviewed in the US as part of a study exploring DAP in kindergartens (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). The researchers found that although all teachers thought that children benefit from child-centred practices, they did not put the idea into classroom practice because they were aware that the approach required more time and they were not confident about their ability to implement it. The teachers also reported that if they had more freedom to decide instructional practice, they would use a child-centred approach more often. These data point to several barriers to adopting a child-centred approach in US preschool classrooms. It has to be noted, however, that Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett's (2006) study relied on teachers' self-reported teaching beliefs and practices via interviews. However, as Hatch and Freeman (1988), and McMullen (1999) cautioned, listening to what teachers say may not accurately reflect what teachers do in their classrooms. For a more valid and nuanced conclusion, Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett's (2006) study could have offered further related data, by augmenting interviews with classroom observation data. The current study employs both interview and observation as primary research methods.

Regarding the relationship between how pre-school teachers handle discipline and child misbehaviours and their teaching practices, Lara-Cinisomo, Fuligni, Ritchie, Howes, and Karloy (2008), showed that some U.S pre-school teachers' beliefs about teaching

practices are shaped by their pre-service or in-service training. Moreover, pre-school teachers adopting child-centred approaches were more likely to report positive attitudes toward teaching as a profession (Rimm-Kaufman, Fan, Chiu, & You, 2006). To sum up, teachers' beliefs about children's learning seem to influence their classroom choices and decisions and thus affect the curriculum and pedagogical practices in the classroom.

2.4.2 Cultural Factors: Confucianism

A brief introduction to understanding traditional Confucian beliefs offers a useful background to understanding a Chinese perspective of learning and teaching. Hong Kong is known for its strong emphasis on education. One of the main reasons for this emphasis is the cultural belief that education can lead a person to a higher social status (Huang & Gove, 2012). This context is closely related to teachers' teaching practices in the classroom and thus is essential to discuss it more detail. A popular assumption among HK people is that the earlier children have school experiences, the sooner they will be better in certain academic aspects (Rao et al., 2010). Accordingly, kindergartens, the main venue where children have initial learning experiences, have an important role to play. The concept of controlling (guan 管) appears to be one of the guiding principles (Jiang, & Deng, 2008) for the Chinese kindergarten teachers to meet parental expectations. As Tobin et al. (2009) found, regimentation and control are appropriate and desirable means of teaching young children in some but not all cultures. Although the term 'guan' (管)

means ‘to govern’, it has a positive rather than a negative meaning for the Chinese. ‘Guan’ (管), is to shape children’s behaviours in Chinese ways (Tobin et al., 2009). Kindergartens keen to provide children with different activities to meet parental and societal expectations of ECE. In other words, teachers and parents are expected to fulfil their roles in shaping children’s learning experiences through offering appropriate teaching and learning activities, which are based on traditional Chinese child-rearing principles (Kim, 2007). According to Wang and Mao (1996), traditional Chinese cultural values are rooted in Confucian doctrines and have shaped Chinese behaviours including learning behaviours of today.

Confucianism, which was founded by Confucius (551-479 BC), one of the most influential philosophers in Chinese culture, thought, and behaviour, has influenced people all over China (Creel, 1954; Hong & Howes, 2014; Kim, 2007). According to Creel (1954), Confucian philosophies have influenced the ways in which Chinese people rear their children. Therefore, understanding the ideas of Confucius is important for understanding Chinese culture and education. Through examining Confucius’ philosophies of education, important visions can be understood (Creel, 1954), such as the development of the current education system and Chinese ways of child rearing.

Confucianism has a profound influence on Chinese views of human nature, moral virtues, social harmony, and education for human perfection (Bai, 2007). To Confucius,

all humans are somehow comparable and it is education that makes them different (Confucius, ca. 500 B.C.E.). Thus, the goal of education is to help persons develop perfect characters (Kim, 2007). Thus, it is crucial to educate humans when they are very young in order to build up their capabilities and ultimately become perfect adults (Hong & Howes, 2014). In view of this, HK children as young as three years of age begin to learn through different opportunities so as to prepare for the future. For example, children might attend classes such as music, dancing, and drawing after school. As the main education sector for the early years, kindergartens are expected to provide children with these necessary knowledge and experiences (Kinney, 1995). According to Confucius, the perfection of human nature is a means of creating a perfect society in which individuals influence one another through interactions (Yan, 2000). In this connection, education has an essential role to play for pursuing the perfection of human nature.

In order to nurture 'perfect' humans and build an ideal society, Confucius emphasised the importance of the moral virtues of humans. As a result, Confucius' idea of teaching was mostly focused on the practical ethics of everyday life (Hong & Howes, 2014; Kim, 2007). Certain Confucian principles and themes set the foundation for understanding influences on education in HK, namely, Confucius' three main virtues of *Ren*, *Li*, and *Xiao*.

Firstly, Ren (benevolence), which is the most important moral concept in

Confucian ideas, is interpreted in English as benevolence, love, humanness, or goodness (Blishen, 2014). Ren is to love each other. People love others for who they are, regardless of their social status and positions. In real life, teachers and parents teach and demonstrate to children how to help one another through everyday activities. To Confucius, Ren is the key moral value that binds together all other virtues (Zhao, 2010). For example, according to Confucius, Ren brings happiness, and being Ren requires observing Li.

Secondly, Li (rituals) is translated as rituals and the right form of conduct (Blishen, 2014). It is about respecting others. According to Confucius, Li maintains harmonious human relations through constructing a balance between ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger, and teacher and students (Mao, 2002). Such sets of relationships are organized in public political order, involving hierarchies (Kim, 2007). For example, a son needs to respect his father, others, elder brothers, and teachers; conversely, older people, such as parents and teachers, should take the lead and help younger persons. In addition, Zhao (2010) confirms "the superiority of parents/adults over children in Chinese culture and of authoritarian patterns in adult/child relationships in child socialization and education" (p. 586). In other words, by defining proper behaviours, individuals recognize their roles and a harmonious society can be achieved (Fung, 1976).

Finally, Xiao (filial piety) is translated as obedience and conformity (Blishen, 2014).

Xiao suggests that children should listen to parents without delaying or questioning, as parents have made sacrifices in rearing children. In the kindergarten context, Xiao means that teacher-child relationships resemble parent-child relationships. Children are expected to follow traditional Chinese norms, for example, respecting parents, teachers, and elders (Wang & Mao, 1996). It is hoped that social order and harmony are maintained by all members of society who are conscious about their rights and responsibilities. In short, a harmonious society is based on a harmonious family, and when every member of the society obtains and acts with such moral qualities, the society can be strengthened and orderliness of the society can be achieved (Yan, 2000). In addition, collectivism is a main method to achieve social harmony (Yan, 2000). According to Yan (2000), children are required to control their personal concerns and feelings to pursue the harmony and benefit of the group. Neither children nor adults are encouraged to pursue their individuality or mention their personal feelings and ideas.

Alongside with his general visions of education and teaching, Confucius extended his approach to ECE. To Confucius, young children are meant to be "little adults," which means that childish behaviours such as being "active," "curious," and "loving to play" should be avoided (Hong & Howes, 2014, p. 40). A well-brought up child is quiet and self-cultivating, and there is an association between a little adult in early years and a successful individual in adulthood (Bai, 2005). In this respect, education for children aims

to create an ideal child (Bai, 2005) who displays calmness and diligence, dislikes play, possesses moral virtues, and has the ability for self-cultivation and self-improvement (Fen, 2002). The elements of Confucius' way of teaching a child to be part of a collective are summarized by, Hong and Howes (2014):

> getting along with others, which was mainly about how to do good things and treat people well rather than badly; disciplines of behaviour, which was mainly about daily behaviour such as how to stand and sit etc. and about how to respond to parents or elders; fundamental knowledge of reading, writing and calculating, among which reading was most addressed; hygiene habits, including forming habits to maintain personal hygiene and help to keep the family environment hygienic; and self-care ability such as how to eat, and how to speak properly according to gender. (p. 41)

In addition, ECE principles have extended beyond Confucian perspectives with frequent references to Western ECE perspectives. Current ECE in HK is a combination of traditional Chinese values of child nurturing and Western influences (Hong & Howes, 2014).

2.4.2.1 Confucian Ideology and Classroom Discipline and Rules

Teachers are seen as authority figures within Confucian ideology, and this fact

plays a guiding role in the cultures of HK, Korea, Japan, and China (Guo, 2006; Katyal & Evers, 2007; Li & Wang, 2004). Due to the influence of Confucian ideas in education, HK teachers are expected to maintain classroom discipline and uphold appropriate behaviours (Opper, 1992; Rao et al., 2010). Children are expected to follow traditional Chinese norms such as paying respect to teachers and parents (Phillipson & Lam, 2011; Winter, 1991), working hard, and making efforts to balance individual and collective relationships (Hue, 2007; Yan, 2000). Children are required to put collective harmony and needs above their personal needs. They are not supposed to express their feelings and views (Fen, 2002; Ng & Rao, 2008). Accordingly, teachers pay less attention to children's individual needs and pay more attention to keeping all children's learning at the same pace using a 'one style fits all' approach (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). In addition, Hue (2007) found that "the importance of discipline is emphasized more than guidance or pastoral care" (p. 39); and that teachers are enthusiastic to tell children what to do and "seem to be technical managers" in their classrooms (Li, 2006, p. 43).

Classroom discipline and rules appear inseparable with teaching young children and rules are fundamental to sustaining good discipline. As explained by Machado and Botnarescue (2010), "whenever you work with children, there will be rules" (p. 81); and "one of the responsibilities involved with teaching is disciplining" (Erden & Wolfgang, 2004, p. 3). Elsewhere, O'Donohue and Fisher (2009) maintained that classroom rules are

"the first place to start in effective classroom management" (p. 75). Rules are defined as expectations and guidelines for students to follow in classrooms (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006). In other words, classroom rules can serve as an effective way to communicate teachers' expectations (McGinnis & Goldstein, 2003). Rules also help children to learn self-discipline and show preferred behaviours (Manning & Bucher, 2003). Children are more ready to learn if they are familiar with and understand the expectations of the teachers (Dowd, 2008). When children follow the classrooms rules, a secure and orderly learning environment can be achieved. It appears that classroom rules can help children uphold proper behaviours later in the educational process as children become familiar with new school life (Wiseman & Hunt, 2008). In other words, discipline is not about punishing and enforcing rules, it is about teaching children how to be well-behaved and, even more importantly, how to understand why some behaviours are more desirable than others (Fields, Perry, & Fields, 2010).

Thus, it is important to investigate kindergarten teachers' view of classroom discipline and rules, how kindergarten teachers enact rules in their classrooms, and, most importantly, the strategies they use to establish and maintain classroom discipline and rules. After all, classroom management is not only concerned with discipline and children's behaviours, it is concerned also with accomplishing the broader purposes of classroom life that are related to learning and teaching.

In HK, a small body of research (such as Hue, 2007; Tam, 2009) has examined the views of educators concerning rules and the difficulties they face while establishing or implementing rules. These studies also reveal interesting findings regarding the characteristics of classroom rules in HK. However, the majority of the studies have been conducted in primary and secondary schools. Studies focusing directly on classroom discipline and rules in kindergartens are difficult to find in the educational research literature. This study of teachers' curriculum and pedagogical practice includes kindergarten teachers' views and classroom practices concerning discipline and rules. It seeks new insights into kindergarten teachers' perspectives and classroom practices related to teaching and learning with young children, and identifies factors such as classroom rules and discipline strategies that may influence the implementation of project and thematic approaches in classrooms.

2.4.2.2 Confucian Ideology and the Notion of Creativity, Critical Thinking, and Problem Solving

As discussed in the previous sections, Confucian ideology seems to capture the views of many Chinese parents and teachers' about children's learning and behaviour. According to Fen (2002), Confucianism is keen on educating children to have certain characteristics such as obedience, conformity and dislike of play. Such characteristics may run counter to a person's creativity (Kim, 2007), critical thinking, and problem

solving skills. This may be a reason why Kim (2007) suggested that people in Confucian societies were less creative than people in Western societies.

Attention is now turned to describing the importance of creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, how to develop such skills in ECE, and how they relate to Confucian ideology. Given the uncertainty and rapid change of today's society (Florida, 2012), it is very important for children to learn how to think creatively and critically to be able to come up with inventive solutions to the problems yet to arise in the unforeseeable future that represents their adulthood (Sawyer, 2006). Recent educational reforms in HK have identified creativity and critical thinking as important major goals in the general school curricula (CDC, 2000, 2001).

A study by Cheung and Leung (2014) found that teachers in HK were not confident in their own creative abilities. Teachers' beliefs in their own creative abilities can affect their teaching practice (Cheung, 2012). For example, believing that children's creativity is fixed at birth and cannot be developed through teaching may affect teachers' attempt to teach children how to think and work creatively. In their study of factors affecting teachers' creativity-fostering practices, Chan and Yuen (2014) proposed the importance of creativity as a goal in all areas across the curriculum and in all stages of education, including ECE, to help children to enhance their creativity. Children can "experience creativity only when they feel free to play in their thinking, experiments, exploration, and

imagination" (Kim, 2007, p. 30). Other circumstances, such as being in competitive, restricted-choice environments, demands for precise routines under time pressure, and expectations of reward can reduce children's motivation and creativity enactment (Cheung & Leung, 2014; Cheuk & Hatch, 2007; Kim, 2007; Li, 2004). In addition, from their study of early childhood teachers' perceptions of the promotion of creativity among HK, Taiwan, and Shanghai teachers, Chien and Hui (2010) suggested that teachers in HK did not promote deeper investigation of unpredicted or creative ideas. Hence, the enrichment of creativity in pre-school settings may be challenged by a variety of problems and restrictions (Cheung, 2012). According to Kilic (2013), creativity can be weakened or extinguished if it is not developed. In order to promote children's creativity, Kilic (2013) suggests that teachers need to be "creative thinkers, flexible and open to innovations" (p. 123). Children can develop creative and thinking skills through play (CDC, 2006).

Play is also considered to be an effective means by which to promote children's cognitive development (CDC, 2006) such as critical thinking. According to Heyman (2008), it is vital to teach children how to ask and reason critically so as to promote critical thinking. Kindergarten teachers in HK tend to tell children what to do and transmit knowledge to them (Chan & Yuen, 2014; Li, 2006). When children are constantly being told what to do, they are exposed to adult versions of reality, and the

world in which they live can remain a mystery for them. They might not be able to make their own decisions and judgments and might only take in what is offered to them without critiquing. However, in relation to Confucianism, expressing one's own thoughts and feelings is not encouraged as so doing may "disrupt group harmony or make one vulnerable to being hurt by others" (Heyman, 2008, p. 344). Neither would children generally be encouraged to challenge the authority of parents and teachers.

In addition to critical thinking, according to Ashiabi (2007), play can also develop the skill of problem-solving, which is a thinking skill. By using different thinking processes, individuals solve problems through their lives (Sen, 2013). As individuals experience the need to solve problems through their lives, then confront the challenge of learning problem-solving skills (Sen, 2013). Teaching children to ask and answer questions is an important part of engaging in logical argumentation and problem solving (Gillies & Khan, 2009). However, children do not engage in high-level discussion unless they are required to explain and give reasons for their answers (Gillies & Khan, 2009). According to Gillies and Khan (2009), children are rarely asked challenging questions where they are required to think about issues and justify their answers. Teachers tend to ask factual or close-ended questions, or make announcements that require no answers.

Traditional Chinese cultural values are embedded in Confucian doctrines, which can affect teachers' classroom practices. I have briefly outlined Confucian views on

human nature, moral virtues, social harmony, and education for human perfection, intending to demonstrate both the richness and the complexity of this philosophy. I have also discussed the relationship among Confucian ideology and classroom discipline and rules, play, creativity, critical thinking, and problem solving. Although Confucianism is the main influence on Chinese traditional culture, the ideologies of Buddhism, Daoism (Kim, 2007) and, still, colonialism, make HK a unique context and have a significant influence on Chinese culture and education. Therefore, factors such as colonialism and how it has influenced and continues to influence education, particularly ECE in HK, require discussion.

2.4.3 The Influences of British Colonial Rule

Hong Kong was a British colony from 1842 so that by 1997 and had been subjected to British imperial rule for 155 years. On 1 July 1997, HK was reunified with China and became a special administrative region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC), existing under a "one country, two systems" policy (Glenwright, 2010, p. 68). That is, HK was "promised self-rule (except military defence and diplomacy) by HK people and the maintenance of its capitalist economy, social system and ways of life for at least 50 years without compulsory convergence to the PRC's socialist system" (Law, 1997, p. 41). Such promises included retaining the existing HK education system, which is modelled on the British system and is different from that of China (Glenwright, 2010).

This section briefly discusses how the priorities and decisions of British colonial rule affected political, economic, social, religious, and cultural life in HK, the provision of education generally, and ECE specifically. To begin with, colonialism is understood as the "direct and overall domination of one country by another" (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012, p. 46). The colonizing state takes over the political, economic, educational, social and cultural control of the colonized country. It may "impose socio-cultural, religious and linguistic structure on the indigenous population" (Garba, 2012, p. 54) through education and different kinds of everyday life activities (e.g., drinking, reading, dressing, exercising). In HK, Lee and Law (2014) maintained that, "the influences of colonialism and the related issues of assimilation never faded away;" and "the language, cultural practices, values and tastes, modes of perception, as well as representations of the colonizers continuously haunt the colonized" (p.112). In addition, the formation of colonial legacies at the deepest level is imprinted on the colonized community, which is not easy to remove (Lee & Law, 2014). However, Lau and Kan (2011) commented that, "the colonized people did not passively accept what the coloniser imposed upon them, but shaped its impact to a large extent" (p. 173). For example, the parents in HK remain very concerned about children's academic achievement and they have high expectations of teachers. The culture of HK people was preserved, customs were maintained, festivals celebrated, and Cantonese as the common dialect persisted (Chan, 2007).

Before 1960, the British colonial government adopted a non-intervention policy (Lau, 1997), which meant the colonial government would only become involved and offer support when necessary, and thereby helped to cultivate HK's economy. Such actions were taken with the intention of promoting HK's export trade and re-exports, and to shape HK as a strong financial and commercial centre in the region (Lee, 2009). In fact, exporting goods such as toys, plastic flowers, and clothing to Europe and North America, transformed HK to an important industrial centre in Southeast Asia in the 1960-70s. The thriving economy served as the foundation enabling HK to and gradually change its status to become a booming financial centre in the 1980s (Poon, 2010).

In the area of education, although the HK education system has been "strongly influenced by Chinese culture," Britain has long represented "the principal source of ideas for educational change" (Bray, 1992, p. 83). The colonial experience unquestionably had a significant impact on the education system (Lau & Kan, 2011), including ECE. The establishment of ECE in HK was eventful. In the 1950s, the colonial government introduced and integrated a British-style education system, which included kindergartens (Kan, 2010). The education system included early childhood settings, however these services were not considered as part of the compulsory education system consisting of primary and secondary school.

According to Luk (2008), before 1945 there were no kindergartens in HK. ECE

emerged gradually in early 1950s. One of the reasons was due to the large number of Chinese refugees arriving from China and other Asian countries during this period (Wong & Rao, 2004). To avoid the unstable political circumstances of mainland China and the extensive rejection of Chinese in other Asian countries including Vietnam, Malaysia, and Korea (Luk, 2008), Chinese refugees chose to go to HK, which was a relatively safe place for them. In fact, after the ruin created by the Second World War, HK was in a poor state. Therefore, in terms of urgency, ECE was a minor concern when compared with other more critical issues such as rebuilding factories and other businesses (Luk, 2008). However, large numbers of refugees, including women and mothers, needed to find jobs and needed care for their children while they were at work. Accordingly, different organizations including charities and profit making groups were established to meet these needs. Service provision was focused on the care of children rather than their education and was intended to address children's basic needs (Luk, 2008).

Early childhood education was neglected by the HK education department (Wong & Rao, 2004) and has been described as the "weakest" part of the entire education system, although the situation improved after 1997 (Luk, 2008, p. 18). For example, in the year 1993-94, the education subsidy from HK government's education expenses for ECE was less than one percent, while primary and secondary schools had shared 37.7 % and 53.7% respectively (Wong & Ho, 1996). Before the early 1970s, most of the private

kindergartens were profit making. Many of them employed untrained teachers (Wong & Rao, 2004) and classrooms were poorly equipped (Chan, 2000). Kindergartens used difficult school curricula and syllabi that were aimed at satisfying parents' expectations. Such expectations were academically orientated (Chan, 2000; Luk, 2008) and were in line with the primary one school curriculum (Luk, 2008). Although ECE was included in the colonial education system, all kindergartens were privately operated and, many children attended kindergarten in relatively small and ill equipped classrooms with untrained teachers (Chan, 2000). They experienced a difficult school syllabus and curriculum, and a tight daily schedule (Chan, 2000; Luk, 2008).

The colonial government showed little concern for ECE. In the 1970s, a team of ECE specialists trained in countries such as UK and US, brought new educational ideas to HK such as "Learning through play" and "Activity Approaches" with a focus on teaching in kindergarten (Chan, 2000). The colonial government did not pay attention to such ideas, but in 1981, invited an international panel of educators to review the HK's education system. The resulting Llewellyn Report (Llewellyn, Hancock, Kirst, & Roeloffs, 1982) highlighted the importance of ECE and strongly recommended that ECE needed urgent attention ahead of other levels of education (primary school, secondary school, and university). The Llewellyn Report demanded a high priority for ECE in providing "skilled human resources in tandem with a greater share of the physical and financial resources"

(p. 40). The report also recommended that kindergartens should be part of the government-funded sector eventually, like primary and secondary schools. Nevertheless, there was not enough support for the recommendations at that time. The Education Commission Report No. 2 released a few years later (HK government, 1986) cited research from the US and argued that, "pre-primary education did confer positive benefits on children participating", "but the comparative advantages experienced by such children disappeared by the end of primary education" (p. 38). In other words, the report claimed that ECE had only temporary effects on later academic attainment. This implied ECE was not essential and thus, it should not receive government funding.

Implications for teacher education were also evident. For example, the Llewellyn Report stressed that: "very high priority [should] be given to the training of the teachers" (Llewellyn et al., 1982, p. 40). In responding to the report, the colonial government suggested speeding up teacher training, including in-service training so as to improve kindergarten teaching. However, according to Chan (2000), the training content at that time was not practical or helpful for future early childhood teachers and the dropout rate was high. In addition, prior to 1995, the colonial government did not have a policy to address the minimum criteria for entering the ECE profession (Wong & Rao, 2004). In general, the colonial government did not promote children's overall development but emphasized academic achievement and English learning (Luk, 2008). Other subjects such

as Chinese, art, and moral education were ignored (Luk, 2008). Moreover, the colonial government used similar standards (tests and examinations) to assess kindergarten, primary, and secondary students' academic performance (Wong & Ho, 1996). Teachers in all levels (kindergarten, primary, secondary, and university) tended to work towards preparing students for examinations, and encouraging students to focus their studies solely on the examinations (Wong & Ho, 1996). Accordingly, teachers were expected to teach children academic skills in kindergarten so as to prepare them for the colonial examination system. These political economic and social aspects of HK history and society have influenced what teachers do in their classrooms.

In this section, I have described the historical past and effects of British rule (1945-1997) in HK and the development of ECE. The situation of ECE during colonial times was problematic and kindergartens were entirely the hands of private organizations. The quality of these private kindergartens varied and most were established for profit making. While colonial circumstances have extended to current ECE practices, demographic and social factors, which are discussed in the following section, have also played a part in contributing to the overall development and practices of ECE in HK.

2.4.4 Demographic and Social Factors

Demographic factors appear to be among the myriad of factors affecting teachers' choices of learning and teaching approaches. In HK, the average domestic household size

has reduced, from 4.2 in 1976 to 3.0 in 2006 (Census & Statistics Department HKSAR, 2006). This significant demographic change means that there are fewer children for whom to provide kindergarten services, which in turn has led to fierce competition between services (Chan & Chan, 2002; Rao & Li, 2009).

Despite literature from the UK and US suggesting that a good ECE program should be child-centred, play-based, and informal (Copple & Bredekamp 2009; Cheng, 2001; Elkind, 1986, 1996; Hughes, 1999), many HK kindergartens still adopt didactic, academic-orientated approaches to teaching. In a classic study of young children's early development and learning, Opper (1996) found that HK children were one year in advance of their counterparts from elsewhere for items such as copying their first name and writing their whole name, copying triangles and diamonds, HK children were two years ahead for writing numerals 1-19 and could also write numerals well beyond 19, to reach 100. That is to say, at that time, HK kindergartens put much emphasis on the learning of academic skills, particularly in numbers and writing.

To Opper's, (1996) social development was underemphasized in HK kindergartens. In her study, Opper (1996) questioned whether the substantial achievement in academic skills of children in HK kindergartens was achieved at the expense of skills in other areas. More recent studies suggest that kindergarten teachers report that parents judge their teaching effectiveness according to children's academic results (Chan & Chan, 2002;

Fung & Lam, 2011) and overlook other gains such as children's experiences and social development. Parents' attitudes and expectations may drive this situation as parents influence school policies by exercising choice in the type of kindergartens they prefer for their children (Chan & Chan, 2002; Fung & Lam, 2011). These attitudes and expectations are important in the context of this study, as most kindergartens are under pressure to offer kindergarten education that meets parents' ideals (Chan & Chan, 2002; Opper, 1992; Rao & Li, 2009).

Pre-primary education in HK does not receive government funding in the same way as does primary and secondary education. Organizational and administrative expenditure associated with kindergartens is covered by school fees paid by parents. In this way, kindergarten parents are direct consumers of and stakeholders in school management and policy-making processes. They have the power to choose kindergartens for their children, and to influence pedagogical practices by expressing their preferences (Fung & Lam, 2011). There is evidence that parent expectations and government policy on kindergarten curriculum may be responsible for this circumstance.

2.4.5 Economic and Political Factors

Economic and political factors have also shaped teachers' curriculum and pedagogical practices. As mentioned previously, Chinese parents and teachers traditionally place great emphasis on education and learning. Education is considered

important for the nation's well-being and is seen as a ladder for upward mobility (Fong, 2004). Children's experiences influence their learning outcomes (Tobin et al., 1989). Thus, teachers and parents are expected to shape children's learning experiences through offering appropriate teaching and learning activities. For example, English and Mandarin lessons were placed in the daily schedule in many kindergartens.

According to Cornelius, Blank, and Paua (2003), HK's position in the Growth Competitiveness Index Rankings in the World Economic Forum fell from second in 1997 to seventeenth in 2002. The economic position of HK turned from long-lasting success to an economic recession. In this case, the government relied on education to change the situation. In 1999, with the launch of the Education Reform (Education Commission, 1999), the government reviewed the entire education system. This was the first time ECE was included as part of the system. It appeared that the HK government adopted a greater strategic concern about the role of ECE, identifying it as the first step in life-long learning. In ECE, the reform focused on helping children to "cultivate a positive attitude towards learning and good living habits in an inspiring and enjoyable environment" (Education Commission, 2000, pp. 30-31).

In addition, in 2002, *Performance Indicators* for HK ECE were introduced (Education & Manpower Bureau, 2002). The *Performance Indicators* were a reference guide for self-evaluation and external assessment for kindergartens (Education &

Manpower Bureau, 2002). They included *management and organization*, *learning and teaching*, *support for children and school ethos*, and *child development*. The Indicators were intended to notify the public about the general performance of the inspected schools. Performance was ranked by inspection as unsatisfactory, acceptable, good, and excellent. To this day, the inspection reports are publically available on the Internet, and parents can use these as guides for choosing kindergartens for their children.

While parents' expectations and government performance indicators have distinctive influences on kindergarten teachers' choice of classroom practices, wider educational policy and beliefs about young children's learning influence the development and implementation of curriculum guidelines (Li & Rao, 2005). In 2005, Li and Rao examined and compared the influences of preschool curriculum guidelines and instructional approaches on literacy attainment in HK, Beijing, and Singapore. The researchers found that HK kindergarten teachers tended to follow the *Guide.* The study showed the educational policies influence teachers' teaching approaches.

In addition, the HK government response to globalization has been to "active in setting benchmarks for teacher qualifications, limiting class size, issuing curriculum guidelines and determining whether or not ECE should be part of the compulsory education provision" (Rao et al., 2010, p. 302). In fact, according to Grieshaber and Ryan (2005), "the consequences of globalization" is affecting early childhood teachers in

different angles such as “economic, political and social” perspectives (p. 9). Apparently, knowing what and how teachers think about children’s learning would be beneficial for developing kindergarten curriculum and pedagogical practices in HK.

2.4.6 Teacher Factors

The influence of teacher factors including teachers’ professional qualifications and perspectives on their teaching practice has been the subject of debate (Abu-Jaber, Al-Shawareb, & Gheith, 2010, Brown & Rose, 1995). Teacher education, professional and personal perspectives about children’s learning can affect teachers’ choice of learning and teaching approaches used in their classrooms.

Teacher qualifications are widely acknowledged as the most important factor in terms of contributing to quality pre-primary education (CDI, 1996; CDC, 2006; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2012; Rao, 2002; Rao & Koong, 2000) as qualified teachers make a difference to children’s social and academic performances. Teacher education helps teachers put theory into practice and master teaching approaches. Well-educated teachers are able to create high quality classroom environments and overcome the problem of high adult-child ratios in the classroom (Whitebook, 2003).

There have been some criticisms of the efficiency and appropriateness of

kindergarten teacher training, which has been said to lead to the poor quality of pre-primary education in HK (Rao & Li, 2009). Although various policies indicate a desire to advance pre-primary education training (Rao & Li, 2009), the actions of the HK Education Bureau (EDB) have been slow and inadequate. However, since July 1997, when HK became a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China (PRC) the government determined that all kindergarten teachers should have one year of full-time pre-service teacher education and that kindergarten principals should acquire a Certificate of Kindergarten education or an equivalent higher diploma (Rao & Li, 2009). These programs can be undertaken in some universities and training institutes in HK. Scholarship suggests that these ECE programs contribute to better quality in ECE in HK (Poon, 2008; Whitebook, Sakai, Gerber, & Hower, 2001). Other factors, such as teacher's perspectives on children's learning, also contribute to the notion of a quality curriculum (Chan, 2009).

Ideas of "universal models" and "best practices" in ECE are debatable (Lee & Tseng, 2008) as teachers have their own perspectives on teaching young children. That is, some theories and ideas that are valued and that appear to work well in Western countries may not easily translate to the context of HK. For example, traditional Chinese vision considers that praise could harm children by spoiling them, and Chinese students are more likely to be tolerant of high levels of teacher control and strict discipline (Li, 2004).

As exposure to Western teaching and learning theories increases, there is more support for child initiation in children's learning. Many kindergartens in HK have started to adjust to a more child-centred curriculum and teaching methodology (Yeung, 2009). However, a study of HK kindergarten teachers adapting to new teaching approaches in the form of the Project Approach and HighScope found that the idea of a child-centred approach was at odds with traditional Chinese beliefs and values (Chan et al., 2000). Many kindergarten teachers claimed that they had difficulty in accepting and adopting the new ideas. The kindergarten teachers also revealed that many parents rejected the idea of a child-centred approach. Ebbeck (2002) explains:

> The result of such actions and beliefs [difficulty in accepting and adopting the new ideas] is that we often see the western models of pre-schools and care centres operating in cultures for which they are singularly inappropriate or operating in such a way that nothing of any real value is happening. Matters of quality must be linked to particular cultures and societies at any given point in time. The transplanting of models and methods of any form of human services without appropriate modification is fraught with problems. (p. 10)

Caution was urged regarding the danger of adopting one single model, as one model might only "suit one situation, one child at one time" (Ebbeck, 2002, p. 6). In classroom contexts, teachers' cultural perspectives about children's learning may contribute to how

they cope with everyday teaching goals and objectives (McGillicuddy-De Lisi & Sigel, 1995), perceptions, or values. Teachers' cultural perspectives appear to be among the more important factors that may contribute to teachers' expectations and decisions regarding their choice of learning and teaching approaches. To provide a clear background for comparison, the next section discusses the findings of some research that has been undertaken in different countries with regard to the effects of curriculum and pedagogical practices on children's learning.

2.5 THE EFFECTS OF PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES ON CHILDREN'S LEARNING

The effects of different pedagogical practices on children's learning have been a subject of research for many years (Stipek, Feiler, Daniels, & Milburn, 1995). Here I discuss research that focuses on the effects of pedagogical practices on children's learning in HK and elsewhere, including the US, Australia, and the UK so as to give a better understanding of the empirical background to the present study.

2.5.1 Achievement and Motivation

The influence of curriculum and pedagogical practice, which is the main focus of this study on children's school achievement has been studied for some years, mainly in the US. One longitudinal study, conducted by Marcon (2002) in the US, examined the

long-term effects of different curriculum models on children's all-around development and school achievement over five years. The follow-up study of three different preschool programs, namely, teacher-directed, child-initiated, and "middle-of-the-road" programmes, which involved 295 kindergarten children attending Washington, D.C. public schools (Marcon, 2002), revealed that, by the end of Year 5, children who had experienced academically-directed programs previously had been retained (that is, repeated a year of school) less often than other children. Children in child-initiated classes performed better in basic reading, language, and mathematics skills. Children involved in HighScope programs were rated significantly higher at the end of the second school term than those who were not in regard to initiative, social relations, music and movement skills, and general development. The above findings highlight that teaching approaches have the potential to influence children's development and learning in multiple domains.

Another US longitudinal study evaluated long-term development in terms of intellect, social behaviours, and school achievement with 68 children living in poverty in Ypsilanti, Michigan (Schweinhart, Weikart, & Larner, 1986). The children were at risk of school failure. The study investigated three different preschool curriculum models: the Distar Instruction Program (Bereiter & Engelmann, 1966), the HighScope Program (Hohmann, Banet, & Weikart, 1979) and a Traditional Nursery Program (National Education Association, 1977). Distar Instruction is a teacher-directed preschool program

that focuses on pre-academic skills. HighScope, discussed earlier in this chapter, is an open framework preschool program that focuses on cognitive developmental experiences, whereas the Traditional Nursery School, in Hohmann et al's (1979) study was a child-centred preschool program that valued play and focused on the needs and interests of the children. All three curriculum programs were considered high quality with comparable administrative conditions and student backgrounds in terms of family socio-economic status, gender, and Intelligence Quotient at program entry. Fifty-four of the children were interviewed at age 15. Self-report interviews showed that children in the didactic Distar Instruction group committed twice as many delinquent acts as those in the other two groups. There were five times as many acts of property violence, and social performance was poor when compared with the other two groups. The teenagers who were part of the Distar Instruction programs as young children were involved in far more negative social behaviour when they grew older. They had poor relations with their families, participated less in sporting activities, and initiated fewer requests for help when they had personal problems. The three groups had similar earnings and employment, self-esteem measures, and perceived locus-of-control (Schweinhart et al., 1986).

In the area of motivation in learning, studies reveal that teachers' pedagogical practices have different effects on children's learning motivation. A study by Stipek et al. (1995) involved 227 children aged four to six years from poor and middle class families.

This study revealed that children in highly academic programs emphasising basic skills gained higher scores on a letters/reading achievement test. However, children's outcomes were relatively negative on most of the motivation assessments; they had less hope for being academically successful, took less pride in their attainments, had less confidence in their abilities, relied more on adults' approval, and were more worried about school matters when compared with their counterparts from child-centred programs.

2.5.2 Interactions

In a US study, (Pianta, La Paro, Payne, Cox, & Bradley, 2002) used the teacher-student relationship scales and questionnaires for first grade children and kindergarten teachers and discovered that there was a link between children's academic performance and teacher-student relationships. Children were more positive and well-adjusted in second grade when they had better relationships with their teachers (Pianta et al., 2002). Teacher-child ratio and the class size were found to be equally important as they both could affect the frequency of meaningful contacts between teachers and children (Pianta et al., 2002).

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) study in the UK found that the most successful preschool programs to support children's intellectual development provided structured educational activities while encouraging children to explore and make their own choices (Siraj-Blatchford, 2007; Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva,

Taggart, Sammons, & Melhuish, 2003; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004). The study highlighted that the most effective settings promoted "sustained shared thinking," which is the interaction among two or more people "working together" to work things out (Sylva et al., 2004, p. 6). This study indicated that sustained shared thinking among children and children, and among children and teachers was beneficial. Siraj-Blatchford (2007) suggested that "excellent settings tended to achieve an equal balance between teacher-led and child-initiated interactions, play and activities" (p. 18).

2.5.3 Research on Other Aspects

Different types of preschool programs may have different effects on teachers' attitudes and children's progress in learning. An Australian study (Thorpe, Tayler, Bridgstock, Grieshaber, Skoien, Danby, & Petriwskyj, 2004) investigated the progress of children attending three different programs: a full-time preschool play-based preparatory program, a part-time preschool play-based program, and children's first year of primary schooling. It involved 1,860 children aged four to six years, their parents, teachers and principals in 39 different sites. Findings revealed that teachers in the full-time preparatory play-based program had positive attitudes toward children's learning and that the children in the full-time preparatory "play-based" program made better progress in language and

communication, social-emotional behaviours, and motor development than those in Year 1 or preschool (Thorpe et al., 2004).

Smaller scale qualitative studies also provide empirical support for teachers' use of thematic and project approaches in classrooms. For example, in the USA, a study by Beneke (2000) revealed the views of three preschool teachers about the project approach describing their enthusiasm. The teachers suggested that the project approach could enhance both learning and teaching as it offered a flexible curriculum for teachers and children, and that children could construct knowledge from their concrete experiences.

Again, in the USA, Chard (1999) described seven kindergarten teachers sharing their experiences of moving from a thematic approach to a project approach in their classrooms. The teachers revealed that when they adopted a thematic approach in the classroom, children tended to finish all the tasks together with their peers at the same time. They expected children to pay more attention to the quality instead of the quantity of their tasks, to try tasks that "interest them and work on them to a high standard;" and "to apply their own skills at their own development level" (pp. 8-9). Teachers perceived children had "changed somewhat" and were "capable of completing any task they undertake" (p. 12). The children seemed to complete tasks in a way that aligned with the interests and motivations although Chard suggested they might be too focused on the quantity of tasks (Chard, 1999).

In HK, Li, Rao, and Tse (2012) examined how teachers adapted Western pedagogies for Chinese literacy instruction. The study investigated 18 early childhood teachers in HK, Singapore, and Shenzhen, a city in Mainland China. The researchers asked teachers about their teaching practices and observed how those ideas were undertaken in their classrooms. The researchers found that traditional Chinese pedagogy dominated these Chinese classrooms. The researchers concluded that "cultural appropriateness should be seriously considered when choosing the pedagogies to be adapted" (Li, Rao, & Tse, 2012, p. 603).

2.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

I began Chapter 2 presenting historical and contemporary approaches in ECE, the aim of which was to establish a link between the past and the present, showing how pre-primary education has evolved in HK. I then presented a general picture of the ECE system in HK. I examined and discussed the commonly used teaching approaches in HK kindergartens as embodied in pre-primary programs provided in HK. I discussed key issues, including factors affecting kindergarten teachers' choices of learning and teaching approaches, in considering factors that affected the effectiveness of learning and teaching in ECE. Turning to relevant research, I reviewed studies that have shaped current pre-primary education. These studies explored teachers' pedagogical practices, teaching methods, and programs that could improve classroom practices. While this chapter has

provided background information for this study, the next chapter presents the theoretical framework.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

3.0 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Establishing the assumptions on which a piece of research is based is essential for its implementation. Assumptions shape the researcher's view and inform questions and responses throughout the conceptualization, data collection, and data analysis stages. These presuppositions of the research identify the researcher's stance and indicate the foundations of the ideas that give form to a study. This chapter describes the theoretical framework that underpins this study of curriculum and pedagogical practice in four kindergarten classrooms in HK.

I start this chapter by outlining theoretical perspectives that are relevant to this study and explaining how they are likely to influence curriculum and pedagogical practice via policy implementation. These theoretical perspectives include aspects of Skinner's (1953) behaviourism, Bandura's (1972) social learning theory, Piaget's (1964) cognitive constructivism, and Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism. The last section in this chapter discusses how the theories may work together to allow a better understanding of the curriculum and pedagogical practices in the four kindergarten classrooms.

In HK, the benefit of play has been stated in curriculum policy documents such as the HK Guide (CDC, 2006). The HK Guide (CDC, 2006) recommends play-based learning, which is a hallmark of thematic and project approaches in HK kindergartens. However, the literature on early childhood curriculum and pedagogy suggests that teachers may view play as counter-productive for children's learning (Wu, 2014). As mentioned in Chapter 2, most kindergartens in HK are academically oriented (Chan, 2012), and the curriculum emphasises children's learning of academically-oriented skills. Teachers' choices of teaching methods might rely, to some extent, on their perceptions of children's learning through play. To Wu (2014), such perceptions could either be obstacles or enablers to the greater or lesser use of play-oriented practices. Additionally, in terms of policy implementation, teachers may have their own professional viewpoints on the status that should be accorded to various theories, especially those which are highly valued by Western cultured and may not translate seamlessly to kindergartens in HK. In this case, teachers "do" their own policies (Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012).

As explained by Braun, Maguire and Ball (2010, p. 547), educational policies are "interpreted and translated" by different policy actors in education systems. These policy actors include teachers, assistant teachers, students, and parents. Accordingly, teachers create "their own 'take' on policy, drawing on aspects of their culture or ethos, as well as on the situated necessities" (Braun et al., 2010, p. 547). In this way, teachers create

policy meaning and commit to policy enactment by "working on themselves, their colleagues and their students in order to 'do' policy and to do it well" (Ball et al., 2012 p. 138). Accordingly, the specific ways in which this occurs is context and policy dependent.

Western pedagogical practices such as child-centred and play-based learning approaches, and notions of constructivism are taught in HK teacher education programs (Ng, 2005; Pearson & Rao, 2006). Teachers who have completed these programs may apply these theories in their classroom practices. Thus, Western ideas have infiltrated and are likely to have been incorporated into HK education settings, including kindergartens. Some of the most dominant ideas in education emerge from well-established theories of behaviourism, social learning theory, cognitive constructivism, and social constructivism. These provide major reference points for HK kindergarten teachers' approaches to teaching and learning because of the focus on children's academic achievement (Rao & Li, 2009) and what is taught in pre- and in-service teacher education programs (Pearson & Rao, 2006). Figure 3.1 shows four learning theories which are likely to influence the curriculum and pedagogical practices in HK kindergartens.

3.1 BEHAVIOURISM

Behaviourism has been described as a theory which concentrates on animal and

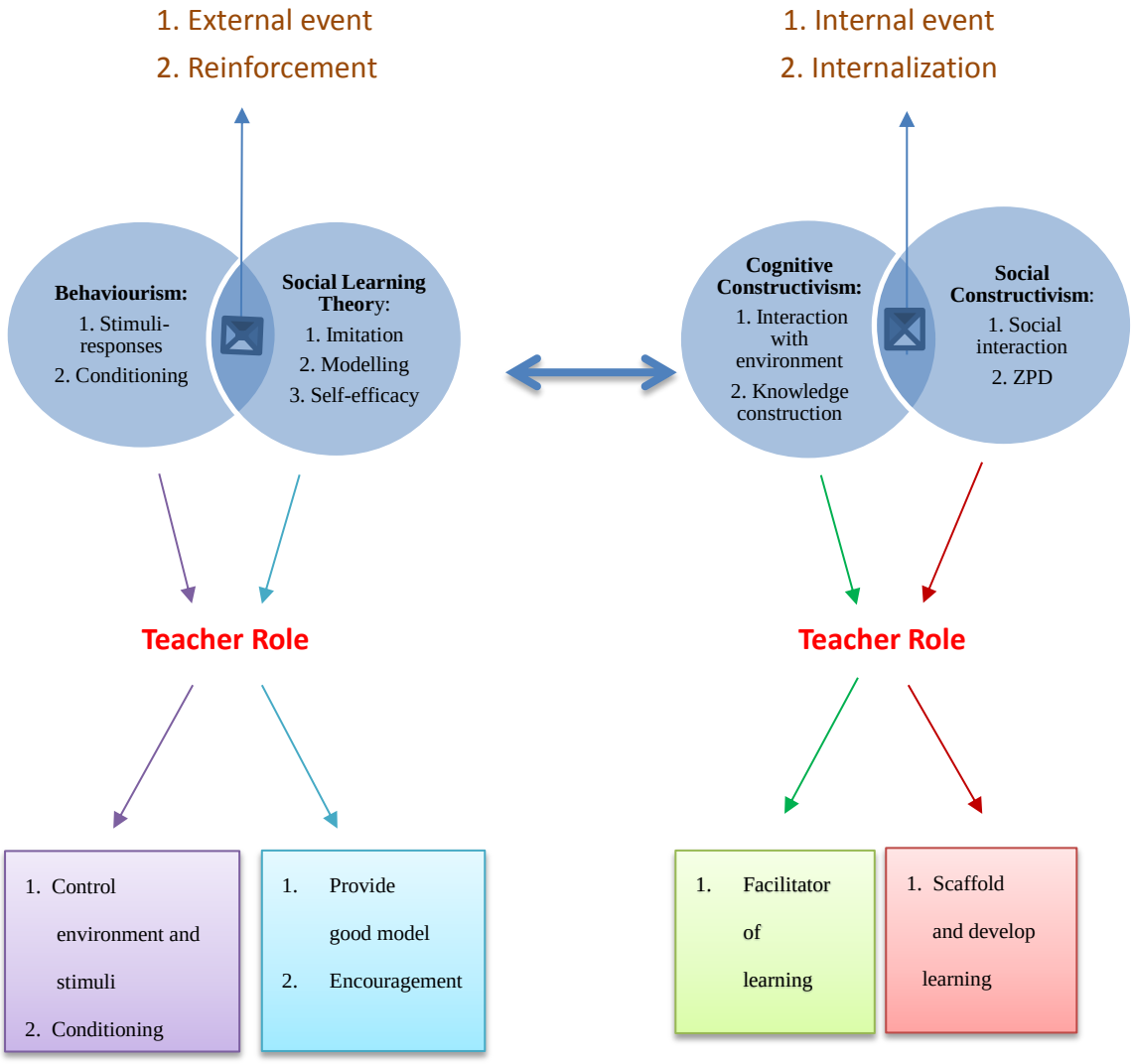

Figure 3.1. Theories likely to influence curriculum and pedagogical practices

human learning (Woollard, 2010) and has, as its main goal, "to determine the law as governing learning" (Klein, 2015, p. 3). Behaviourists scrutinize observable and measurable behaviours and the ways people respond to their environment (Pritchard, 2014). That is, behaviourists are interested in how people act in contrast to what they

think or feel. In classroom contexts, behaviourists support a transmission form of teaching, in which knowledge is transferred to children's minds through language, and children accept the transferred knowledge passively (Hendry, 1996). Children figure out how to behave in the classroom by understanding its system of rewards (such as sitting quietly, thereby garnering praise from the teacher) and punishments (such as being ignored). The idea is that children avoid those behaviours which have been punished and repeat those which have been rewarded. That is, punishment can be used to reduce responses that are unwanted, especially for risky or highly disturbing behaviour (Santrock, 2009). According to Skinner (1958), rewards and punishments govern most human behaviour. Learning in this sense is confirmed by observable changed behaviours. To behaviourists, learning is "the acquisition of new behaviour" and such a learning method is called "conditioning" (MacBlain, 2014, p. 7). Conditioning involves "stimuli," which affect people and may trigger their "responses" (LeFrançois, 1997, p. 111). Skinner's operant conditioning is discussed in this section as it is most relevant to help explain aspects of the teaching behaviours of the four teachers in this study.

3.1.1 Operant Conditioning

Behaviourism focuses on the design of instruction and the conveyance of knowledge, and it aims to enhance effective learning. Operant conditioning theory is the most significant form of behaviourist learning theory (Pritchard, 2014). A classical

protagonist of this theory, Skinner (1904 – 1990) conducted studies on animals and extrapolated that experiences with animals would produce comparable outcomes with humans (Pritchard, 2014). As noted earlier, behaviourists avoid addressing inner cognitive progressions and, instead, concentrate on observable and assessable behaviours and skills. From Skinner's point of view, learning is directed by stimuli from the environment and responses from the learner. The word *operant* "was introduced to distinguish between reflexes and responses operating directly on the environment" (Skinner, 1963, p. 504). Learning is a product of the association between stimuli and responses (Gray & Macblain, 2012). A person's responses then contribute to certain consequences in the environment (Gonzalez-Dehass & Willems, 2013). In terms of operant conditioning, such consequences are termed a *stimuli*. If a person's behaviour creates a satisfying consequence or prevents an exasperating consequence, such behaviour will be conditioned and anticipated to happen again (Gonzalez-Dehass & Willems, 2013).

Reinforcers are a main interest in Skinner's operant conditioning theory. A reinforcer is a stimulus that fortifies the resulting response (Gonzalez-Dehass & Willems, 2013). Reinforcement refers to the process of strengthening that response (Skinner, 1963). In addition, behaviourists propose the terms *positive* and *negative* reinforcement to highlight the fact that rewards are likely to promote certain responses while punishments

reduce or suppress certain responses. For humans, pleasant experiences, such as praise, are positive reinforcers, while unpleasant experiences are punishments. Humans generally look for pleasant experiences and reject or avoid unpleasant ones (Scott, 2013). When reinforcement occurs, positive reinforcement increases the frequency of behaviours. In operant conditioning theory, behaviour is shaped and retained by its consequences (Gray & MacBlain, 2012). By using the reinforcers of operant conditioning theory, human behaviour can be both transformed and maintained (Vollmer & Hackenber, 2001), although reinforcers differ from person to person. There are further important individual differences among children and, thus, teachers need to realize that similar reinforcers may not be equally effective with all children (Phillipson & Lam, 2011, p. 79).

According to Pritchard (2014), behaviourism can be seen in early childhood classrooms on a daily basis. Kindergarten teachers use behaviourist theories automatically when they "offer stimuli to children and reinforce their behaviours without really being aware of what they are doing" (Pritchard, 2014, p. 38). One part of a teacher's role is to deliver the arranged curriculum content to the children effectively. At the same time, children are expected to follow their teachers' guidance and instructions (Wickens, 1973). This might imply that thinking or choices are not involved and that learning is basically a passive process (Scott, 2013) as the role of teachers dominates over the role of the children.

Some aspects of behaviourism, such as shaping, are recognized as enabling particular types of learning. Shaping, which is another important element in operant conditioning, refers to reinforcing learning through small steps and appropriate rewards (MacBlain, 2014). Shaping builds desired behaviour in steps, and is accomplished by rewarding those behaviours that come progressively closer to the selected final goal (Skinner, 1953). Shaping is suitable for use in circumstances where the desired behaviour would otherwise occur rarely or not at all (Gonzalez-Dehass & Willems, 2013). For example, teachers can encourage children to read more books in the book corner by praising children when they enter the book corner. Then children might receive a star stamp after reading a book, as a reward, thus potentially shaping their behaviour. In Skinner's (1953) words, "operant conditioning shapes behaviour as a sculptor shapes a lump of clay. Although at some point the sculptor seems to have produced an entirely novel object, we can always follow the process back to the original undifferentiated lump" (p. 91). That is, through the shaping of behaviour, an infrequent response can be changed to one with a high possibility of recurrence, although this might take some time to accomplish (Skinner, 1953). However, teachers should not rely entirely on shaping to design their teaching methods (Pritchard, 2014), as this might lead to authoritarian practices. Teachers or adults can make use of this knowledge to "create environments that suit humane purposes" (Crain, 2011, p. 201).

In sum, behaviourist approaches argue that children's behaviour can be managed successfully through the careful arrangement of learning environments where specially designed rewards and punishments are used. Behaviourists state that appropriate consequences can improve learning outcomes, and that these are measurable and observable. However, such perspectives on learning are traditionally adult—or teacher-driven— and do not require initiation by the child nor much mental processing or involvement on the part of children (Pritchard, 2014).

3.2 SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY

Social learning theory, first articulated by Albert Bandura, who was born in 1952, focuses on the social nature of learning. People live and work together, share philosophies, and have mutual ambitions to make their social surroundings a better place to live (Gray & MacBlain, 2012). According to Bandura (1989), individuals learn by imitating social behaviours in their unique social settings. That is, individuals learn from others in the societies to which they belong, through daily observations (Crain, 2011). Three principles of social learning theory – *modelling*, and *self-efficacy* and *self-regulation* are discussed in this section as they help to explain teaching behaviours identified in this study.

3.2.1 Modelling

Learning takes place when a person develops new reactions or modifies old ones as a consequence of observing and imitating models (Lefrancois, 1997). This process is, in Bandura's (1969) words, "one of the fundamental means by which new modes of behaviour are acquired and existing patterns are modified" (p. 118). That is, when individuals observe models, they can learn how to solve problems and, at the same time, they understand the possible consequences of their actions. Accordingly, children learn behaviours from observing models in their environment (Bandura, 1989). Such modelling and imitating provide opportunities for children to learn the skills, methods, and values of others (Santrock, 2009). Although the observations involve imitation, observers may or may not imitate exactly what is seen. Observers may apply the observed behaviours in an innovative manner or simply replicate the observed behaviour (Santrock, 2009). That is, children's behaviours are corrected or modified to fit in with their own social contexts. For example, a child can learn self-help skills and game instructions by playing with other children who have already learnt the skills and instructions of the game.

Of significance for teachers is that modelling takes less time than operant conditioning. Bandura (1977) proposed that people learn faster by observing how other people complete tasks: "learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them

what to do" (p. 22). Thus, teachers, other adults, and peers can be role models for children to imitate (Rose & Rogers, 2012). Modelling can provide opportunities for teachers to show children how to cooperate, share, and assist in culturally acceptable ways (Crain, 2011). For example, a teacher says "thank you" when a child helps to pick up rubbish and put it in the rubbish bin.

While modelling can offer opportunities for children to learn, it also provides chances for children to reflect on whether they have achieved their own goals. Social learning theory points out that individuals are constantly creating goals and objectives for themselves and, at the same time, they are assessing if they have accomplished those goals and objectives (Bandura, 1989). Teachers, parents, and peers can motivate children by praising them, although children can also be motivated by the attainment of their own goals. From a social learning theory perspective, teaching young children should emphasize modelling or imitation using encouragement, from which children are motivated to learn (Bandura, 1989). That is, teachers may create an environment in which children are exposed to models and may then provide children with adequate encouragement for them to demonstrate modelling actions (Grusec, 2013).

3.2.2 Self–efficacy and Self-regulation

Self-efficacy can influence a person's feelings, thoughts, motivations, and efforts to learn (Bandura, 1993). Self-efficacy was described by Bandura (1997) as "beliefs in one's

capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p.3). Self-efficacy concerns "people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over their own level of functioning and over events that affect their lives" (Bandura, 1993, p. 118). Individuals' self-efficacy is a major factor in their behaviour across different circumstances and a sense of self-efficacy results from individual experiences (Bandura, 1997). Positive experiences can make people think that they are successful and can do well in a certain area, while negative experiences can make people feel unsuccessful, thus hampering the ability to do well. That is, how individuals judge their self-efficacy determines what type of motivation and effort they devote to activities (Lefrancois, 1997). In addition, self-efficacy is a key "determinant of self-regulation" (Grusec, 2013, p. 27).

Self-regulation was described by MacBlain (2014) as "the ability to press a 'pause' button before taking physical action" (p. 160). That is, "self-regulation reflects the extent to which children are able to control impulses" (Boivin & Bierman, 2014, p. 212). Through the process of self-regulation, children are able to produce pro-social behaviour by regulating external situations and offering a basis for actions (Bandura, 1989). Accordingly, self-regulation is an instrument of personal self-control. As children develop internalized standards by modelling behaviours and listening to significant others such as teachers, they become progressively able to regulate their own behaviour. In other words,

when a person has concrete models to imitate, most behaviour can be self-regulated (Bandura, 1977). Accordingly, an orderly classroom environment is a good place for children to work and play together, and through such interactions, children build up their ability to self-regulate and demonstrate self-efficacy (Rose & Rogers, 2012).

3.3 COGNITIVE CONSTRUCTIVISM

Cognitive constructivism, as described by Piaget (1896-1980), views individual children at the centre of their own learning processes actively constructing their own understandings of the world (Halpenny & Pettersen, 2014). This point of view is different from the more passive view of behaviourism that was mentioned in previous sections of this chapter because it presents a view of individuals as active in their own learning. Cognitive development theory forms the foundation of cognitive constructivist approaches to learning and teaching. It explains how children's cognition develops. Two key aspects of Piaget's theory are discussed in this section: stages of development and the construction of knowledge.

3.3.1 Stages of Development

Age can be used to assess what children are capable of doing or incapable of understanding, from which a theory of development can be designed to explain how children enhance cognitive capacity (Taylor & MacKenney, 2008). According to Piaget

(1962), children's cognitive development is continuous and has four key stages, namely, sensorimotor, pre-operational, concrete operational, and formal operational. The term *stage* refers to the period of time during which a child is at each of the four key sequential phases (Miller, 2010). At each of the key stages, children's brains become able to engage in particular types of interactions with their surroundings. These changes form a sequence that moves ever closer towards rational thinking (Piaget, 1962). Such an ordered view of development implies that a child has to be "ready" and mature enough to transfer to the next developmental stage and cannot be forced into a higher level of cognitive functioning (Kwon, 2002).

The stages of development are linked to children's ability to learn at different ages. Therefore, intervention is meaningless unless the child reaches a specific age and stage (Ultanir, 2012). In other words, the route from stage to stage "marks a fundamental and qualitative difference in the way children perceive the world, the way they process and respond to information, and the way they develop ideas and concepts" (Moore, 2012, p. 8). To Piaget, learning is "a process of spontaneous invention and discovery" (Crain, 2011, p. 143) where children construct knowledge actively by their own volition and are "not simply passive recipients waiting to be reinforced from the outside or genetically programmed from the inside" (Rose & Rogers, 2012, p. 64). This contrast sharply with the view of children and learning offered by Skinner (1958). Knowing that the process

happens in each child at variable rates can help teachers support children's construction of knowledge (Ultanir, 2012).

3.3.2 Construction of Knowledge

The construction of knowledge is an intellectual activity. Learning is individual and unique because it draws on past knowledge, interests, cognitive levels, and skills. The implications of Piaget's theory and its potential application to young children's education created the foundation for a constructivist perspective in education (Brooks & Brooks, 1999; Taylor & MacKenney, 2008). Because children construct their own knowledge through experience (Piaget, 1964), teachers should support children by providing interesting, yet challenging, materials. By interacting with these materials, children have opportunities to solve problems by themselves and, therefore, construct their own knowledge (Piaget, 1969). Teachers need to create a learning environment which is meaningful, challenging, and welcoming, in which children can explore and construct knowledge (Rogoff, 2013) actively. Active learning involves constant alteration of thought in which "the life of the mind is a dynamic reality and intelligence, a real and constructive activity" (Athey, 2007, p. 33).

According to Piaget (1964), the way children think is different from that of adults.

When children are given chances to exercise thinking, they can resolve problems and difficulties efficiently. Accordingly, teachers are supposed to offer thinking opportunities for children (Taylor & MacKenney, 2008) instead of teaching them how to think. One of the teacher's roles is to set up a learning environment that stimulates children to ask questions. In addition, the most vital element is to encourage children to raise and answer questions, because when children defend their questions with answers, they move to a higher level of thinking (Taylor & MacKenney, 2008). Teachers need to ask a variety of questions rather than seek only correct or incorrect answers from the children. For example, teachers might paraphrase questions and guide children to think of questions from other points of view.

Piaget's stage-based theory has been criticized for its inflexibility and for not reflecting the vast differences in children's abilities and capabilities across all ages (Halpenny & Pettersen, 2014). Stages can restrict children's learning by dictating curriculum arrangements which are "pinned to age-related ways of acting in the world" (Edwards & Knight, 2001, p. 27). Every child is different. Although Piaget did not emphasize the role of adults in children's learning, it is accepted that interaction with an individual child enables teachers to improve their responsiveness to that child's understanding and abilities. That is, teachers find inter-subjective ways to help children

learn (Hayes, 2012). While Piagetian ideas have influenced ECE in the past, social constructivism has been more influential in recent years.

3.4 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

The Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), challenged Piaget's view of the child constructing knowledge individually, proposing that "important others" within a socio-cultural group can help children progress beyond their supposed developmental stage (Ultanir, 2012). Vygotsky insisted that social interaction influences children's cognitive and intellectual development, and stressed the high importance of interactions and conversations between children and adults (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010). Vygotsky (1978) explained:

> Function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people and then inside the child. This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. (p. 57)

Accordingly, children are more likely to construct knowledge with other people who are in the same culture. To Pritchard and Woollard (2010), "learning is a highly social activity" (p. 34) in which children gain knowledge and develop cultural values

through interactions with more able others and peers. Two main ideas of Vygotsky's theory are discussed in this section: the Zone of Proximal Development and Scaffolding.

3.4.1 Zone of Proximal Development

The zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), is an important concept in social constructivism. It refers to "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). To Vygotsky (1978), knowledge is constructed within a social context, and takes account of the values and beliefs of the children's family and community around them (Mooney, 2000). These values and beliefs have an influence on children's learning and ways of thinking (Mooney, 2000). The teacher's role, which is active, has a significant effect on children's learning. From a social constructivist point of view, the assistance of a teacher or a more able peer can help children to grasp concepts and thoughts which they do not understand on their own. The teacher's role in cognitive constructivist classrooms is less active, functioning more as an on-looker who observes children interacting and exploring their surroundings. However, teachers in social constructivist classrooms are more active in guiding and stimulating children to think when they come across problems. Teachers give encouragement and suggestions when necessary so as to help children reach their "level of potential development" (Bodrova &

Leong, 2007). In sum, learning is interactive, and involves joint activities that take place in certain social situations (Rose & Rogers, 2012), which play an essential role in the development of children's cognition (Gourgiotou, 2014).

3.4.2 Scaffolding

As noted, peers, teachers, and parents can support children within their zone of proximal development by offering assistance in activities. This assistance is known as scaffolding, which is "like a temporary scaffold that comes down when construction is finished" (Crain, 2011, p. 246). The goal of scaffolding is to help the learner to achieve a higher level of development by using different methods. The teacher's role in scaffolding is to provide different strategies for problem solving, such as asking questions to redirect the learner's thinking. Scaffolding refers to "measured and appropriate intervention which has the purpose of enabling a learner to move forward" (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010, p. 38).

Observing how children work together might provide information for teachers to understand children's learning processes and determine the kind of scaffolding they need to offer to support a higher level of learning (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). At the same time, teachers can make use of these experiences to enhance their teaching skills in general when working with children. Thus, scaffolding is a vital element in the process of teaching, providing the right information at the right time or evaluating the outcomes. It

also concerns creating interactive opportunities in which children are actively involved in different activities with other, more able students that allow them to take advantage of those interactions (Gonzalez-Dehass & Willems, 2013). When children work together, they can scaffold each other by modifying tasks or helping each other to solve problems. Moreover, children copy their peers' behaviour and understand why they behaved in particular ways.

Teachers play a significant role in influencing children's learning. The teacher's role is active. Teachers can give structural and directive hints, as well as support children through probing conversation and further social negotiation (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Social constructivism emphasizes learning as a social process, and meaning and understanding are developed throughout this process. Learning does not occur only in an individual; nor is it the passive development of behaviour. Learning is influenced significantly by external forces (McMahon, 1997). Accordingly, teachers might need to observe and work with children in different areas of learning and development so as to create the correct scaffold and support children at the "right place and right time" (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010, p. 38).

Social constructivism concentrates on the social aspect of children's learning (Rose & Rogers, 2012). From a social constructivist perspective, teachers need to recognize that the most appropriate learning method comes from students constructing knowledge by

working with others. Therefore, core programs, classroom collaborations, and issues should permit learners to construct knowledge with their peers, rather than accepting pre-arranged information from teachers (Green & Gredler, 2002). Social constructivist principles provide lenses for exploring teaching approaches, teaching practices in classrooms, strategies that teachers utilize, and the environmental contexts that teachers create to improve children's learning. The next section discusses how the theories that have been discussed here work together to enhance teaching and learning.

3.5 HOW THE THEORIES WORK TOGETHER

Although behaviourists, social learning theorists, cognitive and social constructivists have differences in the ways they conceptualise children's learning, their ideas serve as reminders and indicators as to how children learn and how teachers can support children's learning. Cognitive constructivists such as Piaget argue that children learn on their own, from an intrinsic interest in the world (Crain, 2011). Thus, classroom practices may need to involve spontaneous exploration opportunities in which group effort and exchange among children are practiced and valued (Gredler, 1997). Moreover, classroom activities might need to provide unstructured learning and problem solving opportunities to promote children's cognitive development (Roblyer, Edwards, & Havriluk, 1997). However, commentators on Bandura's theory suggest he "doubts that children learn much on their own, out of an intrinsic interest" (Crain, 2011, p. 216).

According to Bandura (1969), children would not be motivated to explore everything that is out of their reach. To behaviourists, the behaviour of learners is the result of external stimuli. Behaviourism ignores the internal cognitive processes of learners and concentrates on measurable behaviour and skills (Pound, 2011). So accurate responses of learners are reinforced immediately. In other words, behaviourists and social learning theories suggest that teachers need to motivate children and help them to learn; they need to use rewards and punishments, and provide children with appropriate models

(Scott, 2013).

To social constructivists, inquiry is a major part of learning (Gray & MacBlain, 2012). Children's minds play an active role in managing, creating, and exploring, rather than solely discovering or receiving factual information passively (Lyddon, 1995). According to social constructivists, life experiences influence a person's development and learning. Social context also affects learning and shapes a person's thinking. In other words, learning and development are related to social contexts. To Vygotsky (1978), with adult guidance or collaboration with more able peers, children can solve problems which are beyond their identified developmental level. Social constructivism focuses on society's role in the development of a person (Taylor & MacKenney, 2008).

In order to fit with the rapid pace of life, children are required to be adaptable, flexible, and possess problem solving skills (Pound, 2011). They have to undertake self-

initiated explorations of materials and be actively involved in acquiring knowledge. Cognitive and social constructivism emphasize active learning over direct teaching. That is, the role of teachers is not only what behaviourists suggest - concentrating on the transmission of information to the children - it is also necessary for teachers to emphasise experiential activities and provide rich learning environments to stimulate children's cognitive growth (Taylor & MacKenney, 2008). As a result, children should be able to interrelate, investigate, and extract relevant information.

It seems that different theories have their strengths and limitations. For example, appropriate stimuli and consequences can improve children's learning outcomes, however, at the same time, children might be discouraged from having mental challenges and self-initiated ideas (Pritchard, 2014). Both cognitive and social constructivists assert that learning derives from a learner's own construction of experience, while behaviourism emphasizes that learning is produced from the "outside, by the external environment" (Crain, 2011, p. 180). While these ideas apply to varying degrees in different situations, more importantly, how they work together to suit the needs of children requires teachers' careful consideration. Western learning theories, such as Skinner's behaviourism, Bandura's social learning theory, Piaget's cognitive constructivism, and Vygotsky's social constructivism contribute to the identification of teaching practices in this study.

These theories act as lenses through which to explore teachers' perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices in the four kindergarten classrooms.

3.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The theories discussed in this chapter illustrate that learning is a more complex process than any one theory suggests. Each theory stresses an important aspect that affects general learning practices. When the theories are drawn on, the result can illuminate corresponding strategies and different possibilities in children's learning. It appears that there is no single best way of teaching, even though all four theories pinpoint the necessity of being thoughtful about the distinctive characteristics and inspirations of each child. Teachers are expected to know how to help children in different learning situations, and should try to apply appropriate theories rather than following a single theory of learning in their classrooms. The next chapter discusses the methodology approach used in this study. The methodology chapter explains the design, and the process of undertaking the study and through the use of different research instruments (interviews, observations and field notes) to answer the research questions.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.0 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter describes the methodological approach of this study. According to Silverman (2005), methodology involves the choices researchers make about research design, methods of data collecting, and forms of data analysis. In other words, a methodology is a plan for completing a research study. This chapter illustrates the design and procedures in eight sections. The first section outlines the research aim and research questions. The second section describes the qualitative paradigm (interpretive approach) of the study. Next, the third section discusses the overall research design and the justification for employing the particular strategy. Following, the fourth section provides information and the rationale for the selection of research sites and teacher participants. The fifth section clarifies the data collection methods. Then, the sixth presents the data management and data analysis, which is followed by issues and limitations in section seven. The chapter then concludes with a summary in section eight.

4.1 RESEARCH AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this collective case study is to investigate kindergarten practitioners' perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices in four Hong Kong (HK)

kindergarten classrooms. A better understanding is necessary to provide a more informed perspective for implementing project and thematic approaches in Early Childhood Education (ECE) in non-Western contexts such as HK. With a small sample of teachers from kindergartens in HK, this study aims to:

i) investigate teachers' perspectives on thematic and project approaches;

ii) explore current curriculum and pedagogical practices used in implementing thematic and project approaches;

iii) examine similarities and differences in teachers' teaching perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices when using thematic and project approaches;

iv) identify the factors shaping teachers' perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices; and

v) offer explanations about how curriculum innovations are adopted and implemented in HK.

The study addresses four research questions:

The overarching question is: 'What are kindergarten teachers' perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices in kindergarten classrooms?' Four supplementary questions were addressed to answer the main research question:

i) What are teachers' perspectives about thematic and project approaches in four kindergartens rated as "good" by the HK Education Bureau (EDB) (two using a thematic approach and two using a project approach)?

ii) What curriculum and pedagogical practices do teachers use in the two kindergartens adopting a thematic approach and the two kindergartens using a project approach in kindergartens rated as 'good' by the HK EDB?

iii) What are the similarities and differences in teachers' perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices when using thematic and project approaches in the four kindergartens rated as 'good' by the HK EDB?

iv) What factors guide teachers' curriculum and pedagogical practices in the two kindergartens adopting a thematic approach and the two using a project approach, all of which have been rated by the HK EDB as 'good'?

4.2 INTERPRETIVE PARADIGM

In relation to research paradigms, Basit (2010) wrote "paradigms are models, perspectives or conceptual frameworks" (p.14) Paradigms facilitate researchers in putting their judgments, beliefs, visions and practices into a logical whole (Hughes, 2001). Accordingly, every paradigm is the organization of the researcher's beliefs about the nature of knowledge and the relationships between knowledge and the researcher. In addition, knowledge is composed of practices and is based on a person's beliefs about

how new knowledge is constructed (Hughes, 2001). As the researcher, I must consider which approach is most appropriate for this study, as the research paradigm would influence all aspects of the study. According I framed the research topic and question, decide the research methods for data collection, and determine the type of knowledge to be produced in the study (Hughes, 2001). As stated by Cambell, McNamara, and Gilroy (2004), the positivist and interpretive research paradigms are the means for understanding the world and individual behaviour within it. While positivists consider that the world is logical and follows rational scientific laws such as cause and effect, interpretivists argue that reality is a collectively constructed phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, the social world is not just "out there" waiting to be interpreted, but "in here" or "in us"—it is our interpretations (MacNaughton, Rolfe, & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001, p. 35). This study employs a qualitative interpretive paradigm of enquiry. Interpretivists are concerned with meaning and understand persons as actors in the society in which they interpret meanings and actions in line with their own personal viewpoints (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Thus, knowledge and truth are created rather than discovered (Schwandt, 2003).

The assumptions of interpretivism take into account three related components: ontology, epistemology, and methodology. First, ontology refers to beliefs about the nature of reality (Creswell, 2013). Interpretivists assume that reality is socially constructed through culture (Schwandt, 2000). Schwandt (2000) pointed out that there is

"no way to experience real relations of a society outside of its cultural and ideological categories" (p. 198). Thus, members of the same society share meanings, and "these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically" (Creswell, 2013, p. 25). Consequently, teachers' pedagogical practices and children's learning behaviours in the classroom are shaped and influenced by the wider society of HK (i.e., Confucius principles, government policies, Western ideas of ECE, and parents' expectations). In the context of this study, teachers have their own perspectives of and strategies for teaching young children, such as planning curriculum, arranging classroom environments, and making sense of children's progress. Children come to the classroom with different characteristics, backgrounds, and life experiences. They react and interact with teachers and peers with their own unique communicative approaches and negotiate strategies so as to share meaning (Schwandt, 2000; Creswell, 2013).

Second, epistemology discusses how people acquire knowledge and the relationship between the researcher and participants (Creswell, 2013). Epistemology assumes that knowledge is produced through dialogues and interactions, which are social and cultural acts. Given that this study is intended to expose children and teachers' complex interactions in the classroom, a way has to be found to understand these relations. Conducting observations in classrooms and interviewing teachers are appropriate approaches, as they facilitate a better understanding of the participants' interpretations in

their classroom context (Pring, 2000). Moreover, the researcher is a member of the wider society, who carries her own values, beliefs, and understandings and, thus, influences the study through conceptualisation of the research, and the collection, interpretation, and analysis of data. Thus, reflexivity in the process of research is stressed by the interpretivist approach. As Creswell (2013) explains, reflexivity is about researchers' awareness of their own experience, perspectives, and prejudices, which they bring to the research. Being a Chinese researcher, I have had personal experiences with both Chinese and Western cultures, having lived in HK and the United Kingdom (UK). In this study, my role is to identify and interpret participants' ways of constructing the world in classroom settings (Glesne, 1999; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

Third, methodology concerns the design, techniques and process of the research (Creswell, 2013). Ontological and epistemological assumptions establish the social construction of meaning and reality and, thus, the methodology utilised should be in alignment with these assumptions. This study investigates the complexities of two curriculum approaches in everyday classroom life. Real cases in natural settings can provide comprehensive and rich narratives (Creswell, 2013).

4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study investigates four kindergarten teachers' perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices in relation to the adoption and implementation of project and thematic approaches in four HK kindergarten classrooms. It concentrates on observations of classrooms and kindergarten teachers' accounts of their experiences in their own classrooms. It relies on whatever the teachers said about their experiences and practices, including their perspectives about why they acted as they did, their understandings, and the feelings they expressed and explained. The task of studying classrooms lends itself to particular types of research, as Schulz (1997) explains:

> Teaching is a complex activity… the mystery of what really happens in the classroom, why and how it happens, continues to challenge us. Teaching is a uniquely personal and intuitive activity that requires us to focus on its qualitative nature if we are to increase our understanding of it. Research that focuses on the personal and recognizes the importance of the autobiographical in the process of teaching, while at the same time chronicling the classroom actions of the teacher, provides a broad evidential base from which to draw conclusions about the practice of teaching. (p. 1)

A qualitative approach is suitable for this study as it sets out to explore kindergarten teachers' perspectives and classroom practices. Complexities relate to the issues of

culture (Confucian); colonialism; language; the ways in which culture, colonialism and language manifest in teachers' behaviours; and the construction and understanding of ECE. Kindergarten teachers' perspectives and experiences with thematic and project approaches are crucial, as are the ways they account for their behaviour in the classrooms.

The purpose of this study is to understand participants' perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices in four kindergarten classrooms. The study investigated similarities, differences, and patterns in curriculum and pedagogical practices associated with the thematic and project approaches adopted by the kindergarten teachers. It explored the teachers' subjective experiences in their constantly changing teaching environments. In so doing, the study provides an in-depth and holistic insight into a social entity or bounded system as discussed below. With such a goal in mind, it was essential to adopt a research approach conducive to exploring real settings. In this study, the starting point was to investigate the socially constructed knowledge of the participants (i.e., the four kindergarten teachers) as they talked about their teaching practices and were observed in their classrooms. As the researcher, I constructed new knowledge according my interpretations of the data provided by the participants, coloured by my own understanding of teaching practices and what I have studied about ECE.

I have been studying and working in the field of ECE for many years. I have an intimate knowledge about kindergartens in HK. Since new knowledge was created from

my interpretation and reconstruction of information given by the participants, the resulting interpretive effort was necessarily subjective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Wellington, 2000). I now discuss collective case study, the design adopted in this study.

4.3.1 Collective Case Study

A case study is an "in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam, 2009, p. 43). Boundaries around a particular "entity" and the focal point of the case provide a general account and clarification of a unit (Merriam, 2009). Elsewhere, Stake (2005) suggested that while a case study is a process of investigation, it is also the product of that inquiry. He continued: "case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied" (p. 443). When a case is chosen for study, it needs to be studied "analytically or holistically, entirely by repeated measures or hermeneutically, organically or culturally, and by mixed methods" (p. 443). Case study researchers are not interested in assumptions and testing; rather, they are more concerned about understanding, extracting, and interpreting phenomena (Merriam, 2009). According to case study methodologist, Stake (2005), there are three types of case study. The first is an intrinsic case study, where researchers conduct a study only when they are interested and wish to know more about a particular case in "all its particularity and ordinariness" (p. 444). The second is an instrumental case study, where the researcher is less interested in the "depth" "contexts" and "ordinary activities" of the case (p. 444). Instrumental case

studies mainly provide insight into an issue or "redraw a generalization" (p. 444). The concern here arises from the particulars and potentially exceptional or distinctive characteristics of the case. Instrumental cases typically describe a specific case of a broader phenomenon (Stake, 1995). The third is a multiple case study (or collective case study), where a number of cases are studied to explore of a phenomenon, person, or common situation. The additional cases being examined may contribute to better understanding and theorizing about the phenomenon under study (Stake, 2005).

A collective case study approach was adopted in this study. It draws data from a number of cases that are both distinctive and similar. Collective case studies are used to investigate particular phenomenon, describing the full range of influences associated with the phenomenon (Stake, 2005). This study aimed to describe, explore, and better understand the phenomenon of teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogical practices in four kindergarten classrooms. Case study is particularly suited to research that stresses the distinctiveness of a social phenomenon that arises from meanings attached to the phenomenon by participants (Pring, 2000). As there is a lack of local empirical research about project and thematic approaches and as the factors that shape these curriculum and pedagogical practices are not clearly evident, it is appropriate to use a collective case study approach to "illustrate the issue" (Creswell, 2013, p. 99) and extend knowledge in this area.

4.4 RESEARCH SITES AND PARTICIPANTS

Purposive sampling (Stake, 2005) was employed in this study. Purposive sampling is a technique used by researchers to select sites and/or participants intentionally, with some criteria and attributes in mind that address the research questions (Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam (2009), researchers need to decide what selection conditions are crucial in selecting the individuals or sites to be studied as the criteria established for purposeful sampling directly "reflect the purpose of the study and guide in the identification of information-rich cases" (p. 77). Moreover, the researchers also need to set a series of "attributes essential" to the study and to search for a "matching list" (Patton, 2002, p. 70).

Given this study adopts an interpretive approach, it reflects Mertens' (2005) assertion that the sites and participants should be selected with the aim of providing rich information. In other words, purposive sampling is appropriate in studies where the researcher wants to gain deeper understanding of a phenomenon, and, therefore, participants are selected from whomever the researcher can learn the most (Merriam, 2009). Purposive sampling allows researchers to study the phenomena in depth (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003; Mertens, 2005; Patton, 2002; Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). When research questions are associated with comparisons, it seems that using purposive sampling provides a better chance to understand the relationships (Hesse-Biber, & Leavy, 2011).

Four teachers were purposively selected for this in-depth study as four has been recommended in the literature as a suitable number for this type of case study design (Patton, 2002; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

This study focused on investigating the use of two current teaching approaches: the thematic and project approaches. The two guiding principles for selecting the participants were that: i) they worked in kindergartens which were rated as "good" by the HK EDB; and ii) the kindergartens in which they worked had adopted either the thematic (Shoemaker, 1989) or project approach (Katz & Chard, 2000). The study, therefore, relied up on an existing rating system to determine participant eligibility. In 2000, the Quality Assurance Framework was introduced to pre-primary schools by the EDB "as the key role in the improvement of schools" (EDB, 2012, p. 1). The review teams from the EDB carry out "quality assurance inspections to evaluate pre-primary schools' performance and make an overall professional judgment on whether a pre-primary school has met the prescribed standards" (EDB, 2012, p. 1). The inspection reports are publicly available on the HK EDB's website.

The four teachers purposively-selected for this study worked in four HK kindergartens. In terms of location, three kindergartens were in Kowloon while one was in the New Territories. Figure 4.1 shows a map of HK SAR indicating the locations of Kowloon and the New Territories. The recruitment procedure is detailed below. To

recruit participants, I first searched on the EDB website for suitable kindergartens using thematic and project approaches, and I then made phone calls to kindergarten principals to explain my research purposes and procedures, and to request their participation.

Figure 4.1. Map of HK SAR [www.ChinaTouristMaps.com].

Four out of seven principals agreed that I could carry out the research in their kindergartens. Each principal introduced me to one K3 (upper kindergarten) teacher so that a total of four teachers were recruited for this study. I arranged a time to visit each of the teacher participants in their kindergartens. I talked about the study's aims and significance and told them about the research procedures, duration, method, and process of data collection, what information I needed to collect, and how I would analyse the data. I also explained my role as a researcher during the observations, how I would handle the

information with confidentiality. I explained that they would have the right to withdraw from the study at any time if they desired (see Appendix A-C). I stressed that the purpose of this study was not to judge the participants' teaching performance or ability and that I would not discuss their teaching with their principals. All principals and teachers showed their understanding of the purpose of this study. All of the principals (Appendix A), teachers (Appendix B), parents (Appendix C) and I as the researcher (Appendix D) provided signed a consent form (Appendix A-D) before data collection began. These actions helped to create trust among the teacher participants and me, and encouraged the participants to share their perspectives, practices, and attitudes regarding their teaching approaches.

Pseudonyms for the four participants (Chantelle, Yuki, Lucy, and Miki) were used to protect the teachers' identities. Chantelle worked in a non-profit kindergarten which was sponsored by a religious organization. It used a thematic approach as its teaching approach. It was positioned in a church in Kowloon Peninsula. Most of the kindergarten children were from middle income families and they lived nearby the kindergarten. In terms of teacher qualifications, there were three types of ECE qualifications, which were obtained by the four teachers: Qualified Kindergarten Teacher (QKT), Certificate of Education (CE), and Bachelor of Education (ECE) (BEd). The QKT is a two-year program, and is the minimum teacher education qualification required for teaching in

kindergarten. The CE is also a two-year course but at a higher level, while the BEd is a three-year part-time course and is the highest level among the four teacher education qualifications as it is a Bachelor degree. Chantelle had eight years of teaching experience in the same kindergarten. She had completed the QKT, CE, and BEd programs. She had four years' experience of teaching upper kindergarten (K3).

Yuki had a QKT qualification. She had been working in the early childhood field for nearly 23 years and in this kindergarten for 12 years. She had 10 years of experience teaching K3 children. Yuki's school was comparable to Chantelle's kindergarten in being non-profit and sponsored by a religious organization. It also used a thematic approach to teaching. The kindergarten is located in two public estates and one private estate. In these areas, the kindergarten children were mainly from low to middle income families.

The kindergarten where Lucy worked shared some features in common with the kindergartens where Chantelle and Yuki worked. It was also sponsored by a non-profit and religious organization. The kindergarten used a project approach to teach. Lucy had completed a QKT and CE course. She had 20 years of teaching experience in kindergartens and had worked in the same kindergarten for 19 years. She had nearly two years of experience teaching K3.

Miki had seven years of teaching experience in kindergartens and she had worked in this kindergarten for four years. She had three years of experience teaching K3. The

kindergarten in which Miki worked used a project approach to teaching. The kindergarten was run by a non-profit religious society. Children attending this kindergarten were mainly from a private estate, which was situated near the kindergarten. This suggests that most children were from middle income families. Miki had completed the CE and BEd courses. Table 4.1 illustrates some key characteristics of the four teachers.

Table 4.1 Characteristics of the Four Teachers

	Chantelle	**Yuki**	**Lucy**	**Mike**
Qualified Kindergarten Teacher (QKT)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Certificate of Education (CE)	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Bachelor of Education (BEd)	Yes	No	No	Yes
Employed in non-profit kindergarten	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Years of teaching experience in kindergartens	8	23	20	4
Years of teaching experience in K3	4	10	2	3
Years of working in the same kindergarten	8	12	19	4

4.5 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The data collection methods included semi-structured interviews (Appendix E and F), classroom observations using an observation guide (Appendix G), and field notes (Appendix H). The semi-structured interviews explored kindergarten teachers' perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices in four kindergarten classrooms.

Classroom observations were conducted using a custom-made observation guide designed to record teachers' behaviours and to reveal consistencies and inconsistencies with the interviews. Table 4.2 illustrates the contents and purposes of the data collection methods.

Table 4.2 The Contents and Purposes of the Data Collection Methods

Methods	Contents	Purposes
Semi-structured interview (audio record)	Interview Four Teachers	Find out teachers' perspectives about project and thematic approaches
Non-participant Observation (observation guide, field notes, photo-graphy (mobile phone), video re-cording	Observing teachers' practices in classrooms	To compare what teachers said in their interviews with actual classroom practices to determine similarities and differences
Field notes (paper and pen)	Recording relevant details about the teachers and their classrooms	To capture special incidents that occurred in the classrooms

4.5.1 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were selected for this study. According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), interviews have different focuses and are like special conversations that make the responses from the interviews more meaningful. As maintained by Holstein and Gubrium (2003), "interviewing provides a way of generating empirical data about the social world by asking people to talk about their lives" (p. 3). To Rubin and Rubin (1995), interviews are "non-directive" and "usually comprise[d] themes rather than specific questions" and are "a way of finding out what others feel and think about their world" (p. 1). That is, interviews gather "participants' experiences, views and [understandings]

concerning a specific research question or phenomenon of interest" (Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2009, p. 309).

Semi-structured interviews involve closed and open-ended questions (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). It is important to consider the appropriate use of general or closed questions, as such questions will answer the research questions. For example, although closed questions may not be able to provoke worthwhile information, closed questions can be used to collect information such as teachers' qualifications and teaching experiences. The wording of questions needs to be flexible so as to facilitate different levels of language to be used and clarifications to be made by the interviewer. For example, "descriptive questions tend to encourage interviewees to talk and expand their stories" (Ryan et al., 2009, p. 311). Prompts help the interviewee to focus on a topic. These are particularly helpful in terms of extending the interviewees' specific views (Robson, 2002). When the interviewer prompts, deeper levels of meaning can be exposed (Ryan et al., 2009). As researcher, I asked open-ended questions to support flexible dialogues, which I hoped would enhance the natural flow of thoughts of the teachers. Such questions also allowed teachers to talk about how project and thematic approaches were linked to the curriculum and pedagogical practices they used in the classrooms.

The goal of semi-structured interviews in this study was to "understand the experience of [teachers] and the meaning they make of their experiences by helping them

to construct and articulate their stories" (Shkedi, 2005, p. 77). Telling stories is a progression of meaning making because when people talk about their experiences in detail, it requires reflection. As Shkedi (2005) explained, when people tell their stories, every word they use is a "microcosm of their consciousness" and that "individual's consciousness gives access to the most complicated social and educational issues" (p. 7). In other words, interviews provide path of inquiry to elicit the meaning within stories that people involved in education make of their experiences (Seidman, 2006).

Two semi-structured interviews (Appendix E and F) were conducted with each teacher. Interviews focused on the role of kindergarten teachers, teaching approaches that were used in kindergartens, thematic and project approaches, and how different factors (such as teachers' views and ideas of children's learning) influenced practices in teaching young children. The first interview was conducted with each participant before the classroom observations took place, and the second was conducted after all of the classroom observations had been completed. The intention of the second interview was to "explore the meanings that lie behind observed behaviours" (Edwards, 2001, p. 131). It also helped me to clarify interpretations I was making. Therefore, the second interview provided an opportunity to gain a further understandings of the observation data gathered in each class (Cohen, Manson, & Morrison, 2007; Edwards, 2001). Together, the two interviews permitted me to develop a deeper understanding of each teacher (Cohen et al.,

2007; Edwards, 2001). Semi-structured interviews are flexible enough to allow teacher participants to express their views. I guided the focus of the interviews (Creswell, 2003) and, above all, I was able to probe questions when areas of concern emerged. Table 4.3 shows the interview details.

Table 4.3 Interview Details

Name of participant	Class	Interview	Interview Dates	Duration in minutes	Total Duration (both interviews)
Chantelle	K3 (Upper kindergarten)	1	17/2/2012	45	85
		2	28/3/2012	40	
Lucy	K3 (Upper kindergarten)	1	19/2/2012	60	105
		2	22/3/2012	45	
Miki	K3 (Upper kindergarten)	1	13/4/2012	60	105
		2	5/9/2012	45	
Yuki	K3 (Upper kindergarten)	1	16/4/2012	75	120
		2	15/5/2012	45	

The creation of an interview schedule is crucial to identify the sequence and process to be used with participants (Ryan et al., 2009). First, I had to consider issues such as aim, objectives, and the nature of the study. The interview questions needed to link to the research questions and therefore were carefully developed and organized. Demographic questions, which were easy to answer, were put at the beginning of the interview. Questions that were related to the focus of the study followed, while some sensitive

questions were withheld until trust had been developed and the interviewees were at ease. The general sequencing scheme was to move from easy to difficult or sensitive. Noting Yow's (2005) view that the environment can influence the contents of interview, I scheduled the semi-structured interviews and conducted them at a mutually-convenient time. They were held in participants' work places. Such arrangement saved participant's travel time, and it stimulated teachers' memories of teaching episodes with children. The length of the interviews varied due to the complexity of the information provided by the interviewees and other factors, such as my probing. The first interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes; the second interviews averaged 45 minutes (see Table 4.3). The semi-structured interviews were conducted in Cantonese as it is the dialect most widely used in HK. This was to make sure that each transcript would reflect the actual meanings intended by the participants throughout the interviews. Questioning is a means to bring out the meaning of a phenomenon when interviewing participants. Accordingly, I "put questions in a straightforward, clear, and non-threatening way" (Robson, 2002, p. 273) and attended to the reactions of participants. Electronic audio-recordings were employed in collecting data in the interviews. Such recordings enhanced the quality of the data because they replicated the exact contents of the interviews, thereby reducing bias (Gall et al., 2003; Gay, 1987; Wellington, 2000). Audio-recording contributed to a continuous

flow of conversation, while allowing me to concentrate on listening and probing respondents' views where necessary. It was easy to revisit the data when required (Bell, 2010). After collecting the interview data, I listened to the audio records of the interviews several times.

According to Ryan et al. (2009), it is necessary to build up a good interview relationship in order to achieve a smooth, successful, and meaningful interview. Ryan et al. (2009) suggested some strategies, which I had followed during the processes of interviews. First, the interview needed to be viewed from the perspective of both the interviewer and interviewee. The interviewer's attitudes, such as being relaxed, confident, and attentive can help to ease the interviewee's anxiety. Second, the interviewer's "active listening" skills, which involve "open posture, appropriate facial expressions and good eye contact," are believed to encourage the interviewee to talk "uninterrupted at their own pace" (p. 311). In addition, Shkedi (2005) pointed to a relevant cultural issue. She considered that the participants speak in their own "languages and idioms", which, "cannot be understood outside of its cultural background" (p. 61). Therefore, the researcher's job is to work with participants so they "describe their cultural stories" (Shkedi, 2005, p. 61). Moreover, Ryan et al. (2009) recommend that if "silence" is used wisely, it "allows the interviewee time to pause and reflect" (p. 311). Accordingly,

successful interviews more likely depend on the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee, their responses to each other, and their joint construction of meaning.

I devised an interview protocol (see Appendix E) and pilot for the protocol prior to the interviews. Two kindergarten teachers who did not participate in the main study were invited to pilot test the interview protocol. I used feedback from this interview to improve the questions, phrasing of questions, interviewer's micro-skills, and ways of asking questions.

4.5.2 Observations

Observation is one of the main sources of data in studies that take place in natural settings (Mertens, 2005; Mulhall, 2003). Observation involves gathering real life data (Robson, 2002) in real situations. In educational research, Patton (2002) suggested that one of the benefits of observations is to collect extensive data on a variety of areas of interest, such as for example in this study, the classroom behaviours of kindergarten teachers and how they interacted with children. Observations also present a clear picture of classroom activities and permit the inspection of the interconnection between what teachers say and what they in fact do, in other words, the relation between teachers' words and practices. The observations (see Appendix G) in this study were commenced after the first teacher interview so that both the teacher and the researcher would know the

procedures of the classroom and observation schedules. Such arrangements aimed to make the classroom observations smoother.

This study employed non-participant observation (see Appendix G), in which the researcher interfered as little with teachers and children as possible to avoid affecting their behaviours (Robson, 2002). I defined the observational categories in advance so as to identify the precise characteristics of the observed phenomenon, namely, the teaching practices in the classrooms. Data were gathered in a systematic way where my role was mainly to follow the observational schedule. On the one hand, non-participant observation allows the identification of what is happening in a classroom situation, for example, who is there and when and how things happen in a given context. It allows the researcher to focus on collecting data and at the same time not affect the research processes (Moug, 2009). On the other hand, it is not possible to get rid of the "observer effect" as "participants may alter their behaviours as a result of being observed" (Casey, 2006, p. 77). In this study, I visited each kindergarten once before starting the observations for 45 minutes to enable the teachers and children to become familiar with my presence (Casey, 2006). As Mulhall (2003) argued, most teachers do not have time to retain altered behaviours which are different from their normal behaviours (Mulhall, 2003) and, thus, tend to forget the existence of the researcher (Patton, 2002).

Observations were undertaken in each classroom for two hours twice per week for three weeks in total. This "prolonged engagement in the field" enhanced the authenticity of the results (Nicholls, 2009, p. 642). In spending time in the classroom, I aimed to achieve a kind of 'saturation' (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011) so as to arrive at a point where no new matters were rising from the data (Casey, 2006).

Another concern inherent in non-participant observation relates to what Moug (2009, p. 112) mentioned "the degree of participative" in the non-participant observation. He pointed out that although observers may be silent and unresponsive when they were taking notes in the classroom, this action might actually attract children's attention and create "unwelcome reactive effects and jeopardize trust and goodwill built up between the researcher and the actors in the social setting" (p. 211). In classroom contexts with young children, participation to a certain extent is unavoidable. During the observation period, I was a visible rather than an invisible observer in the classrooms. Whenever I entered the classrooms, I was greeted by the teachers and children. Sometimes, children would come up to me and ask what I was doing (which happened to be writing), ask for help with homework, give me little gifts or snacks, and so on. In these particular situations, I tried to respond as quickly and as unobtrusively as possible. I just smiled and nodded to the children and said, "Thank you." It seemed that it was not possible for the non-participant observer to be invisible. To respond to such situations, Moug (2009) suggested that "The

observer can aim to become a familiar presence in the setting, a presence that excites no comment and that does not affect behaviours. An alternative, one that is at the same time possible to sustain and is compatible with the non-participative role, is that of being akin to a piece of furniture: visible but familiar" (p. 112).

It is important to stay in one observation spot when observing in the classroom, and that the observation spot "permit[ted] observation of as many interactions as possible" (Casey, 2006, p. 83). In this study, I adopted "mobile positioning" (Casey, 2006, p. 83), which means I followed the teacher participants during the observation period in order to capture the thematic and project teachers in the context of their daily teaching practices.

My observations recorded the activities of teachers in daily classroom routines. All classroom observations were video recorded. I also completed an observation guide (in English, see Appendix G), which contained 115 items, immediately after the observational and sessions before details were forgotten. Video recordings were used to revisit the observation sessions due to the long list of items making up the observation guide (see Appendix G). It was difficult to observe and write down observations for such large volume of items at the same time. The video recordings helped me to capture and review what was happening in the classroom.

The observation guide involved two parts (see Appendix G). The first part dealt with the key characteristics of teaching approaches while the second part focused on teaching strategies. Observations concentrated on the following areas: teaching strategies and curriculum, learning experiences, and learning environments. Each observation session was two hours in duration. As requested by the kindergarten principals, I was allowed to observe two of the three-hours of the kindergarten schedule. The remaining hour was ordinarily devoted to language lessons (English and Mandarin), which were taught by specialist English and Mandarin teachers who were not participants in the study. Table 4.4 provides details of when the observations occurred.

Table 4.4 Observation Details

Date (2012)	Name of Participant	Class	Data Collection Method	Length/ time	Total time	Observation
21/2, 29/2, 2/3, 7/3,	Chantelle	K3 (Upper kindergarten)	Observation guide/ video/field note	10 am – 12:00 (noon)	12 hours	Observation (1-6)
1/3, 8/3, 9/3, 14/3,	Lucy	K3 (Upper kindergarten)	Observation guide/ video/field note	10 am– 12:00 (noon)	12 hours	Observation (1-6)
17/4, 23/4, 27/4,	Miki	K3 (Upper kindergarten)	Observation guide/ video/field note	9- 11 am	12 hours	Observation (1-6)
20/4, 25/4, 4/5, 7/5,	Yuki	K3 (Upper kindergarten)	Observation guide/ video/field note	10 am – 12:00 (noon)	12 hours	Observation (1-6)

Video recording allowed a comprehensive record of uninterrupted sequences of teachers and children's interactions, movement, and conversations (Caldwell, 2005). That is, videos provided multidimensional observation of teaching behaviours. Information collected provided thick and rich data about teachers' perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices. Above all, it captured classroom activity permanently and allowed me to revisit the data when necessary (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Mukherji & Albon, 2010). I listened and watched the video at the end of the day after each observational period and matched the data with the written examples. The examples were transcribed verbatim from written Chinese (Putonghua) text into English (Chen & Boore, 2009). After translating the Chinese data into the English, I invited two colleagues to check if the translation was correct and that it conveyed precise meanings of the teacher participants (Chen & Boore, 2009). I focused on the original meanings of the teacher participants in order to sustain the quality of the data interpretation.

Although this process was time consuming, it ensured that the examples were well recorded and could be analysed within their context. There are limitations associated with video recording. In using such data, I made a choice of what to focus on and ultimately what to exclude in the videotape (Caldwell, 2005), as it was impossible to include all events that were occurring. Some data, such as teachers' and children's interactions, might not have been analysed unless another alternative was available. Field notes written

in Putonghua provided supplementary details to set the scene (Caldwell, 2005), such as who else was present at the time of video recording and reflections after observations were completed.

4.5.3 Field Notes

Field notes were used to complement the video recording and to capture special incidents that occurred in the classroom (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010). It is important to have recorded "all the relevant details about the participant and the setting" (Mukherji & Albon, 2010, p. 115) so as to develop a careful and systematic approach. I wrote field notes same day that each observation was completed; sometimes it was immediately after field work and sometimes at night. In addition, I transferred the field notes from the notebook to a computer for easy storage. I recorded my own comments based on what I heard, saw, experienced, and thought (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This included descriptions of the instructional strategies, descriptions of physical characteristics of the classroom settings, and my personal reflections. Field notes allowed me to record potential biases and subjectivities. In addition, field notes were made regarding my thought process as a researcher, possible ways to organize the data, and ideas for analysing the data collected (Merriam, 1998, 2009). An example of a field note can be found in Appendix H.

In sum, semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and field notes were employed as the key methods for collecting data. The application of multiple data-collection methods contributes not only to trustworthiness and validity of explanations (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011), but also to the construction of thicker and richer descriptions in the data (Glesne 2011; Richards & Morse, 2013). The combination of these methods, as Glesne (1999) suggested, is feasible to (i)"elicit data needed to gain understanding of the phenomenon in question", (ii) "contribute different perspectives on the issue", and (iii), "make effective use of the time available for data-collection" (p. 31). All sources of evidence supported each other in helping to gain understanding of the teachers' perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices used in the four kindergarten classrooms. The next section explains the thematic analysis that was used to analyse the data.

4.6 DATA ANALYSIS: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

This study employed thematic analysis to analysis data. Thematic analysis is a method for "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). While Howitt (2010) saw thematic analysis as a qualitative data analysis method, Boyatzis (1998) perceived it as "not another qualitative method but a process that can be used with most, if not all, qualitative methods" (p.4). In addition, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested that thematic analysis has a number of advantages. It

is straightforward and user friendly for students and novices to qualitative methods. It can accommodate rich and comprehensive data as it is applicable to different theoretical and epistemological approaches. Above all, research findings are relatively easy for the general public and policy makers to understand (Howitt, 2010). However, there are disadvantages of thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), many thematic analyses reveal a "lack of transparency" and unclear guidelines imply an "anything goes critique of qualitative research" (p.78). Such comment may affect the readers' confidence in the merits of the analysis.

This section explains what thematic analysis is and how I applied it. As recommended by Howitt (2010), researchers need to have "intimate knowledge of their data" (p.164) I went through all the procedures for collecting, transcribing, reading and re-reading the data in order to achieve this goal. In addition, the process of transcription is described by Braun and Clarke (2006) as a key phase of data analysis within interpretative qualitative methodology. The transcription process is an important phase because it could influence the understanding and interpretation of data and it also considers how meanings are created.

The translation issue is important for this study. It was designed in English, conducted in Chinese, and analysed and reported in English. All teacher participants were Chinese and they spoke Cantonese. As such, I needed to translate the observational

protocol from English into Chinese and interviews from Cantonese to Putonghua and then English. I concentrated on the original meanings of the teacher participants so as to try and ensure the quality of the data interpretation. As a researcher and non-native speaker of English, I understand the consequences of the effect that a poor translation of language might create. In order to reduce the potential problem in the translation of the interview protocol and data, I invited two of my bi-lingual colleagues to check their understanding of it. I also asked if they had any concerns or suggestions for the contents. In addition, after translating the Chinese data into the English, I invited the two colleagues to check if the translation was correct and that it conveyed accurate meanings of the teacher participants (Chen & Boore, 2009). The interviews were transcribed verbatim from spoken Cantonese to written Chinese (Putonghua), after which I translated the Chinese text into English (Chen & Boore, 2009). In conjunction with my colleagues and supervisors, I made decisions about how much detail to include and about how to punctuate in the target language (English). Again, the focus was conveying meaning rather than "literally translated equivalents" (Chen & Boore, 2009, p. 236).

The thematic analysis had six steps (see Figure 4.2). In the first step, after collecting the interview data, I transcribed the data verbatim, then summarised it, and translated the summaries from Putonghua into English for data analysis. I organised the data according to the type of data collection method used (interview transcripts, photographs,

observation guide, and field notes; see Appendix H), and filed it in chronological order. Then I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006, p. 87) step-by-step guide for thematic analysis.

The object of the first step was "familiarizing yourself with your data" (p. 87). Accordingly, I read and re-read the data so as to know and became 'intimate' with it. At the same time, I took notes and thought about an informal way to code the data. Such actions provided the "bedrock for the rest of the analysis" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). Without this process, the analytic effort might be inadequate (Howeitt, 2010). The second step involved 'generating initial codes.' After I had familiarized myself with the data and had some thoughts about coding it, I started the second step by identifying the interesting elements within the raw data. Initially the coding was 'data-driven' as the coded themes depend on the data. After the first coding, I then went through the coded themes using some of the research questions and coded again so as to identify particular features of the data, such as the teachers' teaching strategies. I coded the extracts manually, sometimes using different colour highlighters (see Appendix H) and at other times photocopying the observation guide and cutting the extracts in to pieces. In the third step, devoted to 'searching for themes,' I concentrated on broader levels of themes. The third step involved re-organization of different codes for possible themes and sub-themes (see Appendix I and J). I had considered the relation between codes and different levels of themes and sub-themes, and I also went through the processes of organizing and

reorganizing themes and sub-themes whenever necessary. Before moving to the next step, I counted examples of different strategies from the observation guide (see Appendix I, J and K). The fourth step was reviewing themes. I gathered the themes and sub-themes to frame a comprehensive picture of the participants' shared experience (see Appendix K). I created a thematic map of the analysis. Next came the task of defining and naming themes. I revised the thematic map and refined the particulars of different themes and sub-themes. I tried to make sense of the overall picture of the analysis. As part of this, I made clear definitions of each theme. In the final step, I created a report to support my analysis. Figure 4.2 indicates the step-by-step process through which I undertook the data analysis.

In the final step of coding, I had identified eight themes, some of which had a number of subthemes. They were selected as examples of the key ideas discussed on the basis of the key terms generated from the coding processes. As the coding served to underline the points to be made in relation to the research questions, it is used to select the quotations presented in Chapter 5, Chapter 6 and Chapter 7.

4.7 RIGOUR, ETHICS AND LIMITATIONS

This section addresses research rigour, research ethics and the limitations of the study. Research rigour is discussed in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

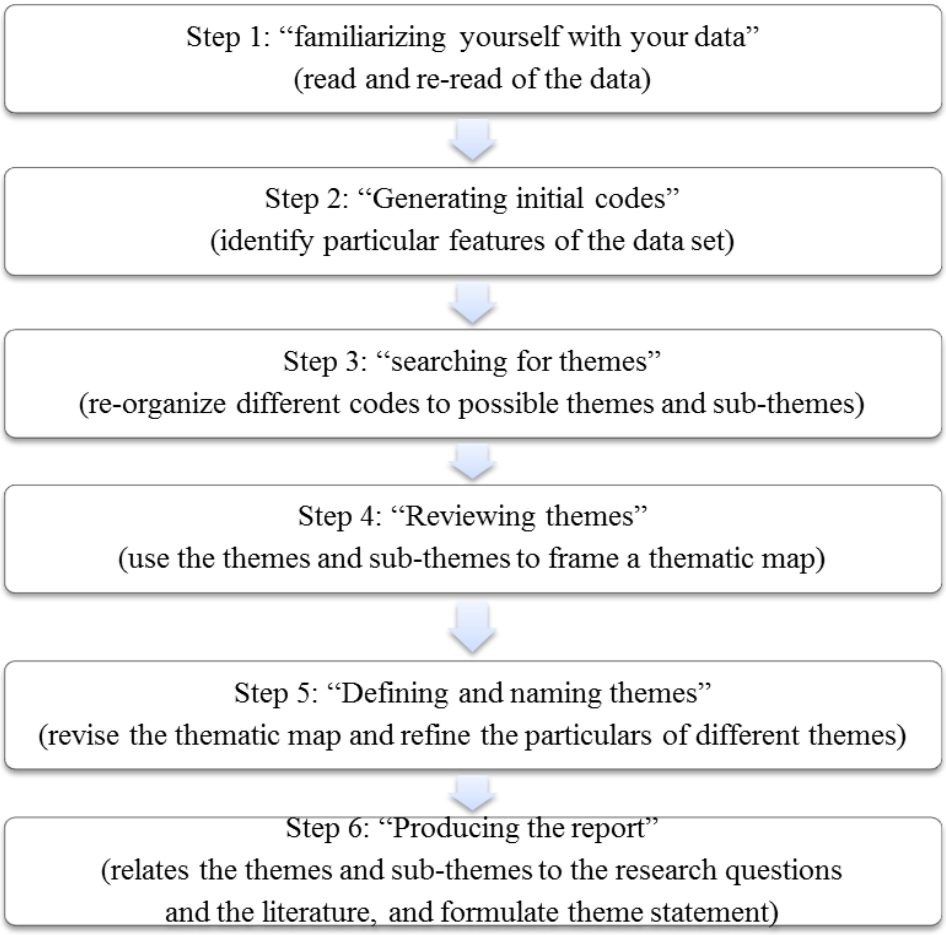

Figure 4.2. A step-by-step guide for thematic analysis

4.7.1 Trustworthiness

The notion of trustworthiness as extended validity was developed by Lincoln and Guba (2000). This set of methodological trustworthiness criteria refers to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is "the issue of the inquirer providing assurances of the fit between respondents' views of their life ways and the inquirer's reconstruction and representation of same" (Schwandt, 1997, p. 164).

4.7.2 Credibility

Credibility is "the issue of the inquirer providing assurances of the fit between respondents' views of their life ways and the inquirer's reconstruction and representation of same" (Schwandt, 1997, p. 164). The credibility of this study was increased by the use of "prolonged engagement", "member checks" and "triangulation" (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002, p. 30). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), prolonged engagement entails sufficient observation for the observer to identify characteristics and materials in the site that are "most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and [to focus] on them in detail" (p. 304). In order to make myself to become familiar with all classrooms, I stayed approximately six hours weekly to classroom observation during the five-month data collection period. 'Member checking' includes engaging the participants in the role of confirming the researcher's interpretations and conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking offers the participants an opportunity to access the data and thus diminish uncertainty and confusing assumptions made by the researcher. I utilized both informal and formal member checks so as to confirm and clarify meanings from my data. In this study, the participant teachers reviewed my transcriptions of the interview data. Informal member checks with the participant teachers conducted during my visits. 'Peer debriefing' allows the researcher the opportunity to check uncertain assumptions that arises from the data and obtain advice on methodological "next step" (Lincoln & Guba,

1985, pp. 287), I debriefed my research design, data collection and data analysis with one of my colleagues who was doctoral students in other universities.

The credibility of this study was increased by the use of multiple methods of data collection (semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and field notes) and data triangulation (Mertens, 2005). The data collected from the different methods complemented each other and "triangulated" with each other. In order to "compare and cross-check the consistency of information derived at different time," this study used the cited three methods to illuminate different characteristics of the phenomenon by comparing observation with interviews and checking interviews against field notes (Patton, 2002). However, Patton (2002) argued that the triangulated data may not be directed to a distinct, entirely consistent portrait. The aim of this study was mainly to explore and understand the participants' perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices in four kindergarten classrooms. Although Patton (2002) pointed out that the data from different sources may have different results and these results may have "captured different things," this study, to the contrary, sought to understand the rationales behind the "differences." In fact, as Patton explained (2002), "either consistency in overall patterns of data from different sources or reasonable explanations for differences in data from divergent sources can contribute significantly to the overall credibility of findings" (p. 560).

4.7.3 Transferability

Transferability is "the issue of generalization in terms of case to case transfer" (Schwandt, 1997, p. 164). According to Ercikan and Roth (2009), generalizability refers to the degree to which identical research findings are derivable from populations and settings different from the research itself. In the area of case study research, the issue of generalization draws criticism constantly, as the outcomes are not commonly applicable in real life situations (Robson, 2002). In response to such an issue, Cassell and Symon (2004) stated that generalization is related to theoretical propositions but not related to populations. When the researcher produces a clear conceptual framework, it helps to link theory to the literature and supports generalization (Cassell & Symon, 2004, p. 331). In addition, Simons (2009) proposed that when a case is studied in "its particularity, there is potential both for discovering something unique and for recognizing a universal truth" (p. 167). That is, generalization is not based on the "typicality" of the case but on the "existence of particular processes" that affect the participants' behaviours (Cassell & Symon, 2004, p. 331).

Accordingly, comprehensive investigation of the case in context can disclose overall or particular processes. That is, the "uniqueness" and "understanding" of the case itself are the foci. As a result, "the real business of case study is particularization, not

generalization" (Cassell & Symon, 2004, p. 7). The idea of 'particularization' is adapted to this collectively case study.

4.7.4 Dependability

Dependability refers to the process of the inquiry. The data "should be tracked and be publicly inspectable" (Mertens, 2005, p. 257), and the process of the inquiry should be traceable, logical, and documented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, strategies used for the purpose of dependability include using the same interview schedule for each of the teacher participants (with small variations); using the same methods to accumulate data from each case; and using the same way of analysing the data. I have demonstrated how the inquiry processes have been mapped out in what comes previously.

4.7.5 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to "the extent to which the data and interpretations of the study are grounded in events rather than the inquirer's personal constructions" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 324). In other words,, the interpretations and outcomes must be created from the contexts and participants and not from the imagination (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Mertens, 2005). When I interviewed and observed the teacher participants, I encouraged them to reflect and speak about the teaching practices they used. Moreover, I had arranged a time for dissemination for all teacher participants when the data collection and

analysis was finished. Teachers had a chance to talk about their teaching practices at dissemination. This might promote self-critique and self-reflection on thematic and project approaches. Above all, the processes from the beginning to the final conclusion of this study can be traced from the original data. In this study, I have made the research process as crystal clear as possible by clearly describing how data were collected and analysed and possibly offering examples of the coding process in the final document.

4.7.6 Ethics

This doctoral project was conducted under the auspices of the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), in Australia. Therefore, the research ethics, policies, and procedures were those used in Australian research with teachers and children. Overarching administrative approval was sought to collect data in EDB kindergartens and principals of the kindergartens provided their consent for teacher recruitment.

This research was considered low risk according to the Australian National Health and Medical Council's (2007) *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. The research carried a low risk of harm to participants with the main risk identified as participant inconvenience owing to the time required for their participation.

Ethical principles that were important to observe included voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and identity protection. Written informed consent was

sought from the kindergarten principals as noted above, and also from teachers, and children's parents before data collection began. A request to use audio and video recording was accepted by the principals, teachers, and children's parents as part of the informed consent process. The teacher participants were provided with information about the study contained in a *Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form* which complied with the QUT recommended format. Participants were informed that they could withdraw if they chose to do so at any time without comment or penalty. Pseudonyms were used for kindergartens and all respondents, and identifying details were removed from the transcripts (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Richards & Morse, 2013). The study was approved by the QUT Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number 1100000417).

4.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Limitations included the common critiques of qualitative research methodology as mentioned. Special consideration was given to ways of accommodating these limitations and to ways of diminishing their impact. One frequently mentioned limitation is the researcher's subjectivity. In this study, I was the only person who handled data collection, recording, and interpretation of the data. As background and past experiences influenced the selection, understanding, and presentation of the data, there was a potential for bias.

Self-reflection was essential to ensure the understanding of the information collected from the participants.

A related limitation was that the participants might try and tell what they thought the researcher wanted to hear (Maxwell, 2005). Moreover, the participants might have been defensive and less frank in their answers in the interviews due to the fact that I was also a teacher educator. It is essential to reflect on how and in what ways I might affect the participants' responses. Likewise, the researcher must use enormous effort to construct an atmosphere that is conductive to truthful and open conversation.

A major limitation of this study was the relatively small sample. Due to the time constraints and accessibility of the participants, four teachers were recruited. This limitation restricted the possibility of generalizing (Stake, 2005) findings to other kindergartens and settings. However, the aim was to address the issue of transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), not the issue of generalizability. As a result, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that 'thick and rich' description and comprehensive information concerning the context and background of the study contribute to practical application in other contexts.

I also took other steps to minimize the limitations. Research plan, coding schemes and analysing procedures were discussed frequently with supervisors. I coded all

interview transcripts blindly after removing all participants' names. These steps reduced the association of particular persons to specific data and, thus, reduced the limitation of possible bias throughout data analysis.

4.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has presented a thorough account of the research methodology. Collective case study was employed to demonstrate the perspectives and practices of teachers using project and thematic approaches. Four purposefully selected participants were recruited. Three data collection methods were employed, including semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations using an observation guide, and field notes. A range of strategies, including data triangulation, enhanced the credibility and dependability of the study. Key themes from the findings were identified through thematic analysis. This study contributes to understanding teachers' views and practices about project and thematic approaches in HK kindergartens. Chapter 5, the first of three data chapters presents the finding of classroom environments, routines and activities, and how the data were processed and analysed. By presenting the results of implementing the selected design, a clear account of how the data were further conceptualised and theorised is provided, and thus the research questions will be answered.

Chapter 5: Classroom Environments, Routines and Activities

5.0 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

A collective case study was used to investigate kindergarten teachers' perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices in four Hong Kong (HK) kindergarten classrooms. As a reminder, the four kindergarten teachers who participated in this study, Chantelle, Lucy, Miki, and Yuki worked in four kindergartens in HK. The kindergartens were rated as "good" by the HK Education Bureau (EDB). These data chapters reflect the dominant themes derived from the data analysis. From interview, observational data, and field notes across these three sources, the dominant themes were: (i) classroom environments; (ii) routines and activities; and (iii) teacher-child interactions, and discipline. The research findings and discussion are presented in three chapters. Chapter 5 presents classroom environments, routines and activities. Chapter 6 describes teacher-child interactions, and Chapter 7 reveals the discipline aspect of this study. In addressing the main research question: 'What are kindergarten teachers' perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices in kindergarten classrooms?', these findings chapters present key ideas from the dominant themes identified from the data analysis. That is, in this chapter about classroom environments, routines and activities, the curriculum and

pedagogical practice and its sub-themes including physical environment, learning corners, time allocation, academic and non-academic activities, telling and instruction, questioning, demonstrating, promoting child-centred and child-child interaction, self-help skills, rules and discipline strategies are discussed.

This chapter presents and discusses findings in relation to the four classroom environments, routines, and activities. In this chapter the findings are presented mainly in narrative form. They comprise details from interviews, observations, and field notes compiled during data collection. Where quotes from teacher interviews are offered as exemplary representations of themes, these are presented as verbatim quotes. As noted in Chapter 4, pseudonyms have been used to protect teachers' identities. Interviews were conducted in Cantonese before translation into English. In all instances, participant quotes are provided in English. Participant perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices identified in the chapter themes are also linked to the research and academic literature in a congruent discussion of the findings. Figure 5.1 presents overview of the themes that will be presented and discussed in this chapter.

5.1 CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS

The design of the indoor and outdoor environments in early years settings and the opportunities for engaging with them can reflect how teachers respect and value children as individuals (Robson, 2010). This section describes and discusses how the four teachers

designed the indoor physical environment of their classrooms using learning corners for children to explore. It also examines children's opportunities to make free choices when engaging with the materials in the learning corners.

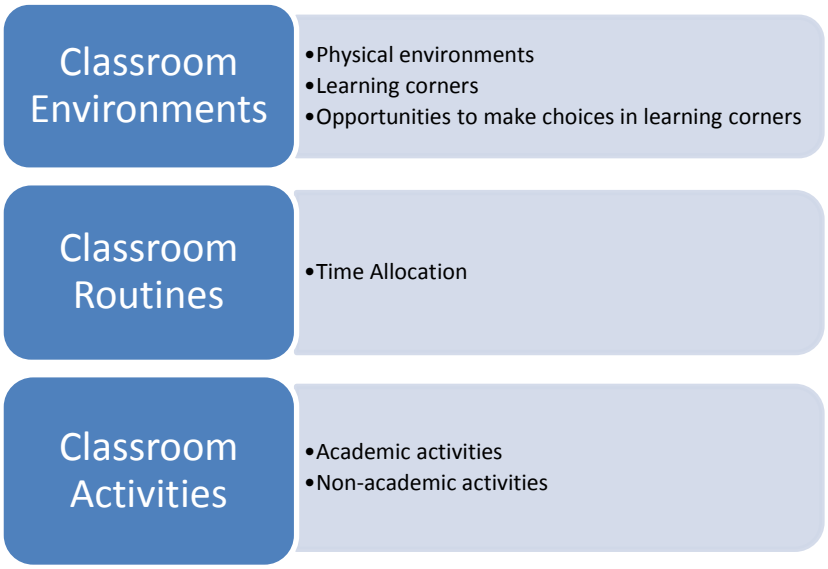

*Figure 5.1.*Themes and sub-themes of this chapter

5.1.1 Physical Environment

The physical environment in this study includes all indoor places in the classrooms, from the ceiling to the different learning corners. According to the interviews, all teachers had some control in constructing the classroom environments, particularly the learning corners. All teachers designed and decorated the classrooms, although children were invited to bring in materials or to help re-organize the corners according to the themes or project topics being investigated. The following excepts describe how Miki (project approach), Chantelle (thematic approach), and Yuki (thematic approach)

explained their classroom design:

> In the beginning of the school term, we [Miki and the co-teacher] will design the classroom together. We try to put relate d materials in different corners, then
>
> Invite other teachers [in the same kindergarten] to see whether the design is comfortable or not. (Miki, interview 1, 17 April 2012)
>
> I will discuss it [classroom design] with my partner [co-teacher], and will change the environment according to the theme of the week. Like now, when we are talking about Spring, we will put up something related to Spring, for example, some butterflies (fake butterflies). (Chantelle, interview 1, 21 February 2012)
>
> My arrangement accords with the size of the classroom and the number of children in the class. I want every corner to have enough space for the children to play in… I seldom change the placement of the corners, as they are fixed. The materials in each of the corners increase depending on the situation, or sometimes I change the materials to accord with the current theme. For example, if the theme is Transportation, I put more paper boxes in the corners so that the children can pretend they are cars and play in them. (Yuki, interview 1, 20 April 2012)

The teachers seemed to be aware that the classroom environments are important in children's learning, particularly in making connections between themes and learning corners, and were concerned to create appropriate learning environments. They involved

the children by inviting them to collect materials from home, which were related to the themes or project topics. Miki and her co-teacher consulted other teachers. According to Copple and Bredekamp (2009), the learning environment frames children and teachers' behaviours, feelings and thoughts. Involving children in creating the environment can improve their sense of belonging and thus engage them more in their learning. Lucy (project approach) paid more attention to the children's interests and motivations, as she stated in her interview:

> We [Lucy, co-teacher and the children] equipped the learning corners together; the children will bring materials from home to decorate the corners. The decoration changes according to the children's interests and the project topics. If the children are interested in a corner, its decorations stay up longer, but we [Lucy and the co-teacher] sometimes add some other materials to make sure the areas remain challenging for the children. (Lucy, interview 1, 1 March 2012)

Involving children in collecting materials from home was important. Lucy sought to sustain children's interests by extending the display period of time and adding challenging elements to tasks. That is, the space (corners) in Lucy's classroom was flexible. She could change or extend the learning corners according to children's interests and her desire to keep challenging the children. When space in a classroom is flexible and easily reconstructed, it supports children's learning (Neuman, Newman & Dwyer, 2011).

In Miki's (project approach) classroom, flexibility was shown in another way: We moved all the toys [from one of the learning corners] to the music room, and then we had a shelf to accommodate the balloons. Children can go to visit this corner from time to time (Miki, interview 1, 17 April 2012). It appeared that the learning corner in Miki's (project approach) classroom was not big enough to accommodate some newly added materials (balloons). Miki was flexible enough to think of another place (the music room) to store the toys. She explained that: [Space in] HK is small. This classroom has 30 children. We hope to enhance their learning as far as possible, and we need to locate and arrange things according to different situations (Miki, interview 1, 17 April 2012).

According to the data and above descriptions, the teachers decorated the physical environment according to themes or project topics at the beginning of the school term. The teachers decided the number, position and nature of the learning corners. Children worked in the learning corners, and when the themes and topics changed, children were invited to bring in new and related materials to put in the corners. Yuki gave further details:

> Before a new theme starts, the classroom design will change. The teachers will change all the decorations, such as pictures and word cards on the wall. All the new decorations will accord with the theme of the week. Children can tell the difference, and they know that the theme has changed. I invite the children to

> decorate the classroom for me. For example, I invited the children to bring in some toy cars. (Yuki, interview 2, 15 May 2012)

Although teachers in general had no control over the classroom size and shape (Cangelosi, 2014), Chantelle, Yuki, and Lucy made the most of teaching materials and resources to enhance the learning environments. However, when compared with the other three teachers' classrooms, Miki's learning environment had fewer materials for the children to explore.

All of the classroom walls and ceilings exhibited children's artwork rather than commercial posters and displays, indicating that teachers valued children's work and their distinctive capabilities. The *Guide* (CDC, 2006) suggests that the "display of children's work can serve as an encouragement to children in general rather than just a means of exhibiting a small number of outstanding items" (p. 48). Figures 5.2 and 5.3 show some of the displays in Lucy's (project approach) classroom that were located on walls and the ceiling. The displays incorporated the children's input rather than the teachers' decisions as to what kind of realistic artwork children should look at or be familiar with. In addition, children were likely to recognize the current theme of the week, as the artwork and decorations went along with it.

In terms of the materials available in the learning corners, all teachers claimed that they were aware of the benefits of providing rich materials for the children to explore

Figure 5.2. Wall displays

Figure 5.3. Ceiling displays

and play with. A variety of materials might act as tools, which help children to develop the skills they might need in the near future. According to Piaget (1962), during the pre-operational period, the crucial task is to give opportunities for the children to act on objects through play. Through active involvement and play with different materials in the classroom environments, children can construct knowledge through their direct

experiences (Piaget, 1964). Accordingly, a quality kindergarten environment should support children's learning through providing different opportunities to explore, observe, question, think and experiment in everyday activities (NAEYC, 2011). Figure 5.4 shows an art corner with different materials.

Figure 5.4. An art corner with art materials

Observations revealed however, that the children in the project classrooms did not have any opportunities to play in the learning corners. Children in the thematic classrooms had a chance to play in the corners, usually for about 10 to 20 minutes every day. This might be due to the fact that the children in the project classrooms did not finish their assigned tasks within the allotted project work time. Thus, the following section discusses only Chantelle and Yuki's (thematic approach) classroom learning corners and not Lucy and Miki's (project approach), because the children in the project approach classrooms were not observed using the corners during the data collection period.

5.1.2 Learning Corners

Learning corners were designed as a place to extend children's learning. The learning corners in Chantelle and Miki's classrooms included a book corner, a doll corner, an English corner, a maths corner, an art corner, a creative corner, and a toy corner. Generally speaking, children were allowed to choose whichever corner they liked when they finished their group work. Chantelle and Yuki used the learning corners as a strategy to organize the learning environment, so that they could observe children (Gordon & Browne, 2014). Chantelle revealed some details on this issue:

> After revising the school song in Mandarin, the children can choose whatever activities they like to do. Four children (3 girls and 1 boy) usually go to the doll corner; I have observed them a few times, and they play in the doll corner right after doing their homework. Today, some children are playing with animal puppets in a group. Some are playing with Lego; some are playing the 'party dress' game. Some children are playing in the creative corner, drawing pictures on a white board. Two children are cutting paper strips. One child is playing computer games, while two children wait for their turns. There are no children in the book corner. (Chantelle, field note, 1 March 2012)

As noted by Chantelle and revealed in my observations, some children kept returning to the same place [corner] with the same peers on a regular basis. Maybe they

liked to play the same game or simply enjoyed playing games with the same peers. According to Gordon and Browne (2014), children learn things by repeating an activity, in which they explore, operate and try out different variations. Both Chantelle and Yuki provided opportunities for the children to engage in play experiences and did not interfere. In addition, while some children were allowed to play in the doll corner, other children took materials from the doll corner and played somewhere else due to the small size of the corner. Figure 5.5 shows the typical size of a book corner.

Figure 5.5. Book corner

Most of the corners could only accommodate two to four children. Moving materials elsewhere was an alternative way to enable the whole class to engage in free play activities after group work. According to my observations, most learning corners in the two thematic classrooms were quiet in nature. These included a book, maths and English corner. Only the doll corner appeared to be noisy in nature, as it encouraged

child-child interaction. Children were required to play quietly in the corners. As observed, there were signs on the walls, which reminded children to keep quiet. Figure 5.6 shows the ‘quiet’ signs, which were written by the children.

Figure 5.6. Quiet signs in the book corner

This indicates that teachers preferred a quiet learning environment. However, Gonzalez-Mena (2005) suggests that when designing the classroom environments, teachers should consider a balance in the types of learning corners, as well as accessibility. That is, balancing the number of quiet and noisy activities benefits children’s holistic development, and easily accessible corners facilitate children’s independent learning (Cryer, Harms, & Riley, 2003). While the teachers in this study provided easily accessible corners for the children, there was little evidence of a balanced classroom environment due to the focused academic approach that dominated the classrooms. Apart from arranging a balanced classroom environment, the teachers also need to consider the specific display of the materials provided (Cryer et. al., 2003). Opportunities for children

to choose age appropriate play materials and activities is an important way in which teachers can stimulate children's learning (Gordon & Browne, 2014), and this can support children's cognitive development (Piaget, 1962).

5.1.3 Opportunities to Make Choices

Generally speaking, children in Chantelle and Yuki's (thematic approach) classes had opportunities to self-select peers to play with, and to choose favourite activities in different learning corners, provided that they had finished their assigned work. However, in some cases, Yuki would 'encourage' children to choose certain corners, as she explained:

> After doing their homework, children can choose which learning corner to go to. I encourage them to go to the book corner. I discovered that the book corner is a bit quiet. Even when I put new books there, the children seldom visit it, so I encourage the children go to the book corner. (Yuki, interview 1, 20 April 2012)

Yuki was concerned about the children's reading. She understood that children need to be involved in reading activities regularly (Crowther, 2007). Therefore, she encouraged children to visit the book corner. For example, it was observed that Yuki asked a child to go to the book corner when the child had finished his homework. However, Beaty (2009) argues that if children are to be totally involved, they have to be interested in learning activities. If the activity that the teachers suggest is not of interest to the children, this has

had flow on effects to their learning. To Beaty (2009), a classroom environment that supports children's choices enhances the development of children's self-reliance. Similarly, Brewer (2004) recommends that children have opportunities to make decisions and share joint activities, as children can sense whether they are in control of their actions.

The four teachers in this study may have planned the learning corners based on specific purposes and criteria (Crowther, 2007). Thus, children who avoided spending time in certain learning corners missed the chance to engage with these materials and skills. In addition, some children in Chantelle's class chose to participate in the computer corner, choosing to spend their already limited time queueing for their turns. However, Chantelle did not remind them that they could play in other corners. In this case, Chantelle reported she was trying to help children get a sense of turn-taking, which, in her view, was a way for children to practice self-control.

5.2 CLASSROOM ROUTINES

This section examines the time allocation for the program in the four classrooms. Routines play an essential part in the daily lives of kindergartens and offer a central mechanism for the implementation of curriculum and pedagogy. With parts of the routines repeated every day, routines provide stability and order to the program and are "the regular or habitual performance of an established procedure" (Gordon & Browne,

2014, p. 283). Generally speaking, time allocation in the classrooms focused mainly on circle time, group time, project time, English or Mandarin lessons, and music and physical activity. Other activities, such as snack time, free-play time, small and whole group time, all depend on the arrangement and timing of other routines. In addition, I was requested by the kindergarten principals to observe the classrooms for two hours of the three hour program. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the remaining hour was allocated mainly for the language lessons. In fact, one of the principals told me that although the teacher was in the classroom for three hours, it was easier for the class teachers to have some time to deal with the class's other business, such as collecting homework and communicating with parents. These are the reasons that I observed for only two hours in each classroom on each visit.

5.2.1 Time Allocation

In each class, each day typically started with an assembly in a quiet area which included checking attendance registers, class teaching and assigning of work. This was followed by group and project work time. In all classrooms, if children completed their group activities or homework, they could start free-play time, in which they could choose to go to their favourite learning corners or choose their favourite activities. However, during the observation periods of this study, no free-play activities were recorded in either project classroom. Music and physical activity time was scheduled on a regular basis:

such as two times per week for 30 minutes each time. All teachers reported that the principals pre-arranged the music and physical activity time for classes in all four classrooms. That is, the teachers themselves had little control over this timetabling. I observed Chantelle's class from 10:00 am to 12:00 noon, and Yuki's class from 10:00am-12:00 noon each time I visited. Tables 5.1 and 5.2 show the timetables for the two thematic and two project classrooms respectively.

Table 5.1 Class Time-Table: Thematic Classrooms

Thematic Classrooms	Time	Duration	Activity
Chantelle	9:00-9:10	10 minutes	Assembly
	9:10-9:40	30 minutes	English or Mandarin lesson
	9:40-9:55	15 minutes	Toilet and snack time
	9:55-10:55	60 minutes	Group activity/ homework/ free-play
	10:55-11:25	30 minutes	Music / Physical activity
	11:25-11:55	30 minutes	Circle time
	11:55-12:00	5 minutes	Pack away time
Yuki	9:00-9:10	10 minutes	Assembly
	9:10-9:40	30 minutes	English or Mandarin lesson
	9:40-10:05	25 minutes	Toilet and snack time
	10:05-10:35	30 minutes	Music/ physical activity
	10:35-11:05	30 minutes	Homework and free-play
	11:05-11:55	50 minutes	Group activity/ circle time
	11:55-12:00	5 minutes	Pack away time

Table 5.2 Class Time-table: Project Classrooms

Project Classrooms	Time	Duration	Activity
Lucy	9:00- 9:05	10 minutes	Assembly
	9:05-9:35	30 minutes	English or Mandarin lesson
	9:35 – 10:00	25 minutes	Music and Physical activity
	10:00-10:30	30 minutes	Homework
	10:30-11:00	30 minutes	Circle time
	11:00-11:55	55 minutes	Project work/ snack time/ free-pla
	11:55-12:00	5 minutes	Pack away time
Miki	9:00-9:10	10 minutes	Assembly
	9:10-9:40	30 minutes	Circle time
	9:40-10:40	60 minutes	Group work (includes project work)/ snack time/ homework/ free-play
	10:40-11:20	40 minutes	Music and physical activity
	11:20-11:50	30 minutes	English or Mandarin lesson
	11:50-12:00	10 minutes	Pack away time

The two Tables summarise the time allocation for particular sessions in the classrooms, namely circle time and English or Mandarin lessons, and show that this was almost identical across the four classrooms. Both thematic and project classrooms allocated 30 minutes per day for English or Mandarin lessons. That is, children might have English lessons on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays while having Mandarin lessons on Tuesdays and Thursdays. English and Mandarin lessons are not a requirement of the HK EDB. That the teachers were teaching English and Mandarin lessons indicates their motivation may originate from other sources, such as the principal and/or parental expectations. Table 5.3 shows the specific time allocation for English, Mandarin, and circle time in the four classrooms.

Table 5.3 Time Allocation of Circle and English and Mandarin

	Time duration	
Session	Circle time	English/ Mandarin
Thematic approach		
Chantelle	30 minutes	30 minutes
Yuki	30 minutes	30 minutes
Project approach		
Lucy	30 minutes	30 minutes
Miki	30 minutes	30 minutes

The duration (30 minutes) of language lessons (English and Mandarin) was the same as for circle time. From a time management perspective, it appears that by allocating these sessions equivalent time, the kindergarten principals were requiring that teachers place equal importance on English and Mandarin lessons and circle time. Homework time is

also allocated a substantial proportion of time and is hence accorded much value.

Time allocations are another signifier of the importance placed on the academic aspects of learning in these four classrooms. These issues will be further discussed later in this chapter. Children in all four classrooms had to do homework. Lucy (project) and Yuki (thematic approach) arranged a special time (30 minutes) as a whole class activity each day for the children to do their homework. It was observed that Miki (project approach) and Chantelle (thematic approach) set homework time as one of the group/ project activities (60 minutes). I observed Lucy's class from 10:00 to 12:00 noon, and Miki's class from 9:00 to 11:00am. Table 5.3 shows the time allocated to circle time, English and Mandarin in the four classrooms. Table 5.4 reveals the allocation of homework time in the four classrooms.

Table 5.4 Homework Allocation

	Thematic Approach		Project Approach	
Homework allocation	Chantelle	Yuki	Lucy	Miki
Special time (30 minutes)	x	✓	✓	x
Group activities (60 minutes for three group tasks)	✓	x	x	✓

A further dimension to the importance of homework is evident in the degree of support it receives, again from kindergarten principals. At the kindergartens in this study, all teachers reported in the interviews that the principals were responsible for authorising the timetables for their classes. During homework time, extra human resources were allocated

to Chantelle and Yuki's (thematic) classes. That is, a classroom assistant would "help with checking children's homework" (Yuki, interview 2, 15 May 2012). This was to make sure children did the homework properly and to speed up the transition time to activities. Children could not proceed to the next activity unless they had finished their homework, and thus assistance was an important part of ensuring that this routine was enacted in the time allocated.

According to Lucy and Miki (project), their classes had no extra human resources allocated for homework time. In Lucy's class, a special time, which was not part of the project time, was scheduled for children to do their homework. It was observed that Lucy and her class partner worked together to monitor the children's homework during that time. As Miki's class, homework time and project time were undertaken in group activity time, and Miki and her co-teacher played different roles. While Miki worked with children for the project tasks, her co-teacher dealt with the children's homework. Not allocating extra human resources could be because Miki and Lucy already had two teachers in their classrooms, and it may have been assumed that they did not need or qualify for further assistance.

Although all teachers mentioned that they had the flexibility to reschedule the length of different activities, they had to consider pre-arranged language lessons, which seemed to be fixed at the centre of the timetable, with other lessons revolving around

them. To some extent teachers could cut short or even cancel the music or physical activities. However, they did not do this with homework, as they understood that parents were very concerned about children's homework (Cheuk & Hatch, 2007). According to Cheuk and Hatch (2007), homework in HK is a prescribed job for kindergarten children. Figure 5.7 shows a group of children doing their homework together.

Figure 5.7. Children were doing homework together

This section has presented data on time allocations in the four classes. Analysis of the time allocation is inseparable from other issues, such as homework and language, which are discussed in what follows.

5.3 CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Pre-school programs and activities have been described as having two dimensions: academic and non-academic (Opper, 1992). According to Opper (1992) and Cheng (2008), academic activities are aimed at preparing children for primary school, and thus

are focused on the teaching and learning of academic skills, which consist of reading, writing and arithmetic. This is essential in HK, where teaching strategies tend to be didactic and teacher-centred (Li & Lim, 2009). Non-academic activities, conversely, are more focused on enhancing other skills such as independence, co-operation and self-regulation (Opper, 1992). Teaching of the latter group of skills tends to be undertaken through play-based and child-centred experiences, and not via homework according to research in the US (Kralovec & Buell, 2000). This section describes and analyses academic and non-academic activities observed in the two thematic and two project classrooms in this study.

5.3.1 Academic Activities

Academic activities, which occurred mainly in circle and homework time, can be seen in different parts of the daily routine in the four classrooms. In circle time, children were required to sit quietly in a gathering area for attendance registration and other business, such sharing experiences of their work or talking about the day's weather. Teachers delivered their planned curriculum in circle time. The purpose of circle time was mainly for direct teaching or academic work for three of the teachers (Chantelle, Miki and Yuki). The content and topics focused on general studies, such as animals, toys, air and people who help us. The following excerpt shows how Chantelle (thematic) delivered a planned lesson on the topic of animals in circle time.

> Chantelle used a related movie and pictures to talk about wetlands [in HK] and introduced some animals (fish, frog and crab), which live in the wetlands. Chantelle used animal pictures (fish, frog and crab) together with the name cards of these animals and asked children to repeat the animals' names after her a few times. Then she asked some children to repeat the names to make sure the children knew how to pronounce the animals' names. (Field note, 23 March 2012)

This excerpt indicates how Chantelle used rote learning and focused on set learning outcomes (e.g., that children would recognise and know the names of a variety of wetland animals). She used a teacher-directed teaching strategy in which she, alone, controlled the content knowledge in the lesson (the proper names for fish, frog and crab) by requiring children to recognise pictures and repeat the animals' names after her. Although Chantelle used movies and pictures to motivate children and gain their interest, children were expected to sit and learn rather than contribute their own ideas. Researchers in the field of cognitive constructivism state that children learn through interaction with the environment (Moyles, 1997; Piaget, 1969); and that through sensory exploration, social experiences and active problem solving, children make sense of and connect with the world around them (Dahlberg, Morse, & Pence, 1999; Piaget, 1969). However, Chantelle's strategies do not show these qualities; rather they reflect a more didactic

approach in which she planned all activities for the children and kept telling children what to do.

Generally speaking, children in HK kindergartens are required to know the "three Rs," namely reading, writing and arithmetic (Cheng, 2008, p. 86). That is, Chinese characters and English words, reading and writing in both Chinese and English, along with counting numbers and completing simple calculations. In conjunction with learning these academic skills, children have homework as part of the daily kindergarten routine. As explained in Chapter 2, "homework" in HK is not undertaken solely "at home". Teachers undertake lessons in class time to ensure children understand and can complete their homework before releasing children to self-select other activities, with the remainder of the homework being completed at home. Homework typically includes Chinese, English and mathematics, although the amount of work in each subject area is different. There is remarkable similarity in the ways in which teachers in the four classrooms approached homework tasks. Figure 5.8 shows a typical daily homework for children.

Figure 5.8. Typical daily homework (English and Chinese Sentences)

A field note reveals the situation in Lucy's class:

> Lucy's [project approach] class had homework time after visiting the restroom. When they [the children] came back from the toilet, they were ready for doing homework. They had three exercise books [homework], one was Chinese writing (making sentences), mathematics (writing numerals 22-23) and English (writing 'taxi' and drawing a picture of a taxi next to the word). (Lucy, field note, 8 March 2012)

While Lucy's class had a substantial amount of homework every day, Chantelle (thematic approach) explained how in her class the homework was scheduled in one week:

> Basically, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday children need to write [do homework]. Every week has two days of writing Chinese, two days of writing English, and one day mainly spent on maths. Both Chinese and English comprise two pages of writing, and for the Chinese, one of these pages must be of phrasal verbs and one of sentences … all these were practised in the first school term. In the second term, [the children] needed to do a little bit of 'making up sentences', e.g., 'He sees a small cat. Father sees 10 cats'. And on Fridays, they [the children] have one revision worksheet [which had front and back pages]. The front page had Chinese exercises, and the back page had English exercises. The contents of the worksheets have been taught already, and the worksheet is just for

a little revision. (Chantelle, interview 2, 28 March 2012)

This excerpt shows that children in Chantelle's class had to do homework every day. The amount of homework appears to be similar in Lucy's class, although the arrangement of the content is different. According to Chantelle, the amount, difficulty, and complexity of the homework would be gradually increased as children moved to more advanced stages. In Miki's class, "children had Chinese, English and maths homework to do; sometimes children would have worksheets. Every Friday, children would have reading and a weekend report to do" (Miki, interview 2, 9 May 2012). A sample of maths worksheet is presented in Figure 5.9.

Figure 5.9. A sample of maths worksheet

In Yuki's class,

…children have three pieces of homework every day: Chinese, English and maths. The Chinese [homework] includes writing phrasal verbs and sentences. Friday is special, because [the children] have a worksheet, which requires parents'

> participation; an integrated worksheet, which includes Chinese, English, maths and general knowledge areas, and a weekend report. (Yuki, interview 2, 15 May 2012)

The amount of homework in Yuki's class seemed very similar to her counterparts. However, children in Yuki's class had to write weekend reports, in a text or picture form, with the aim of sharing their weekend experiences with their classmates. In addition, the parents of children in her class were involved in a worksheet exercise, which needed to be completed at home during weekends and on public holidays. Yuki required parental involvement in children's learning, specifically for homework tasks.

It is clear that homework plays an important part in all classrooms. All teachers reported that they gave homework to the children every day. Common homework tasks observed in this study were writing words and sentences in English and Chinese, and calculations. All children had to do extra homework, which was in the form of worksheets completed with parents during weekends. Worksheets were composed of pictures and text; children had to do some writing, drawing or colouring. It might take approximately half an hour to complete a worksheet, sometimes by the children themselves and sometimes with their parents. Like Yuki's class, Chantelle's class had to do weekend reports as homework over the weekend. Chantelle gave her views about homework: [Children] basically must have homework to do". Homework is important as "children need to do

the homework when they get home… they need to know what kind of homework has to be done" (Chantelle, interview 1, 17 February 2012).

Children in the four classrooms also had workbooks and worksheets as extra homework for weekends. According to Yuki, workbooks and worksheets normally covered Chinese characters/sentences, English letters/words/sentences, and number/calculation work. Such worksheets and workbooks are published by educational commercial companies. Usually, parents do not need to purchase the worksheets and workbooks for their children, as they are part of a teaching kit which has been adopted by the kindergartens at the beginning of the school term. The contents of the worksheets and workbooks are designed according to different thematic topics. For example, in the 'Spring' theme, the contents of the worksheets and workbooks are likely to require children to count or calculate the numbers of flowers, butterflies or bees, all of which are related to the scenes of Spring; or require children to identify the English words for butterfly, bird and so on. Many of the workbooks and worksheets have colourful cartoon pictures and the proportion of text to pictures is normally half and half.

According to Opper (1992), workbooks are created to link children's interests to the early stage of formal academic learning and stimulate children to learn the 'three R's'. Workbooks can be seen as having a two-fold function. While one offers a chance for children to exercise fine motor skills, which are fundamental for writing, the other

provides an opportunity for children to use cognitive abilities, especially for the areas of corresponding and matching (Opper, 1992). In this study, workbooks were not an everyday item, and thus did not dominate the curriculum in these four classrooms. Although the workbook idea may be seen as developmentally inappropriate, all children had workbooks in which they completed extra homework during the weekend. To Opper (1992), the effects of doing workbooks "might not be too harmful" (p.106) if they are not the sole means by which to deliver the curriculum, and are combined with non-academic activities.

By assigning homework to the children, teachers might reason that homework can enable children to build good study routines and promote independent learning and a responsible attitude to learning (Cooper, 2001; Wiesenthal, Cooper, Greenblatt, & Marcus, 1997). In fact, most Chinese parents consider that "children who do not achieve basic academic competencies prior to school will be less likely to succeed in a formal learning environment" (Pearson, 2011, p. 217). According to Opper (1992), kindergartens that offer more formal programs might be seen to enhance children's attainment in primary school. Children as young as three years are required to do homework (Opper, 1996; Li, 2005) so as to enhance academic skills. It seems that both parents and teachers tend to align in their view that homework can promote academic achievement (Brock, Lapp, Flood, Fisher, & Han, 2007). Elsewhere, however, Bennett and Kalish (2006) caution that

when a school pushes children to be academic, it may also push children out of developmentally appropriate levels, including in their class activities and homework. Time spent on such practices may lessen children's opportunities for other hands-on experiences and interactions with real objects (Opper, 1992). It is interesting to note that while all teachers claimed that their schedule of activities was flexible, they cut short the non-academic activity time rather than the academic activity time, when time was an issue of concern. Yuki (thematic approach) described and explained her situation:

> When the amount of homework is large, the time for physical activity can be cut short by five minutes. A shorter physical activity time will leave more time for children to do their homework. It [physical activity time] can be flexible in terms of activity arrangement. (Yuki, interview 2, 15 May 2012)

When Yuki's class had difficulties in completing homework on time, other activities, which were non-academic (e.g. physical activity) in nature were cut short. The time lost to physical activity was not replaced. It seems that teachers have a certain level of flexibility in arranging the timing and activities of children's learning. However, when non-academic tasks were in time conflict with academic tasks, non-academic tasks had to give way. Language lessons in English and Mandarin, which are thought to be related to academic skills, could be another significant concern for teachers and parents. All classes in this study had English and Mandarin lessons. These two lessons occupied the same

amount of time as circle time and homework time. In examining these time allocations, one reasonable assumption would be that these two language lessons were perceived as equally important as circle time and homework time. Lucy (project approach) elaborated in her second interview:

> Basically, we need to finish [project work] at 11:30am, but sometimes there is a very enthusiastic approach to the work, and thus we need another 5 or 10 minutes to finish up. We still can extend the time [according to children's needs]… because we are lucky, the English/ Mandarin lessons were not at 11:30am… other classes couldn't do this [extend the project work time] as they have English/ Mandarin lessons after project work time. (Lucy, interview 2, 22 March 2012)

Accordingly, Lucy's project time could not be extended if the English or Mandarin lesson was timetabled straight after project time. This example suggests that the English or Mandarin lesson was considered so important that it could not be cut short or changed. There was a degree of inflexibility evident in respect to the scheduling of English and Mandarin that was not evident in other lessons. This might reflect parents' expectations about the importance of academic learning (Chan & Chan, 2003; Li et al., 2012), the priority for teachers to follow learning schedules preordained by the principal, and to make full use of specialist teachers who were involved in teaching English and Mandarin.

Most parents in HK prefer their children to learn in English, as it is seen as an

advantage for later schooling (Pearson & Rao, 2006). In a HK study, Leung, Lim, and Li (2013) found that parents agreed that children's later social mobility is influenced by their proficiency in languages as this is seen as the basis for school and life accomplishment. Language proficiency, may allow HK people to compete in the global economy and to maintain HK as a global city (Education Bureau, 2010). Thus, most kindergartens teach English to satisfy parents, and as a form of preparation for children's later schooling (Ho, 2006; Li, 2004; Li & Rao, 2005). However, Wong and Rao (2004) caution that "a mixed-code that combines Cantonese and English, result[s] in a poor standard of learning in both languages" (p. 29).

Academic activities do not occur solely in circle and homework time or in English and Mandarin lessons, but also occurred throughout the school day in the four classrooms. During transition times, teachers took opportunities to teach academic skills, including when parents were picking up their children. As Lucy (project approach) explained: the children don't leave [for home] at the same time [during pick up time], some might go earlier and some might go later. We teach the remaining children or help them to finish their homework [before they go home] (Lucy, interview 2, 22 March 2012). While waiting for parents to pick up their children, Lucy made use of the time to do homework academic tasks with the children (Field note, 9 March 2012). An example from Yuki (thematic approach) indicates the type of activities undertaken in transition times: when

children were lining up to go to the restroom, Yuki asked the children to count from 1 to 50. Children counted the numbers along the way to the restroom (Field note, 25 April 2012). The data suggests that all teachers used every opportunity to get the children to practice academic skills. Asking children to count numbers or sing songs when waiting prevents them from talking to others, something which is perceived as disruptive, and thus keeps children quiet and in order (Li, 2006). At the same time, it can be a good chance to do revision without spending extra time in the already tight schedule.

In sum, teachers were so concerned about children's academic skills that they arranged different times for children to have opportunities to learn such skills. Although it appears that teachers were forceful in introducing academic skills every now and then, children seemed to enjoy the process and were proud of being able to sing and count well. A field note told a tale:

> [Yuki and the children were waiting outside the rest room]. Yuki asked the children if they wanted to sing a song (when she saw some of them were talking loudly). The children chose the 'Policeman' song, and they sang it together. They sang loudly with smiles on their faces. (Yuki, field note, 10 May 2012)

5.3.2 Non-academic Activities

Generally speaking, non-academic activities include music and physical

movement, free-play and snack time in HK kindergartens. As the non-academic activities are not perceived as legitimate learning events, non-academic activities are commonly treated as unimportant. This section describes and discusses the non-academic activities observed in three classrooms. It should be noted that, music and physical lessons were not included in the study's observation period in Lucy's class, as I was allowed to observe for only two hours and project work fell into this period of time. In general, the music and physical activities in the three other classrooms were organized as whole class activities. During the music session children sang songs, played musical games and performed according to the contents of the songs. However, observations showed that teachers added academic input to the non-academic activities, making them rather teacher-directed. The following shows an example from Chantelle's music lesson:

> Chantelle was conducting a music lesson: "Everybody! Let's pretend we are an animal and for a walk… which animal do you want to be"? A child: "elephant". Chantelle: "ok... where is your big nose"? Ready? Let's walk slowly and heavily like an elephant". (Chantelle, field note, 2 March 2012)

Chantelle started the music lesson with an imitation of elephant walk in the music room. Then she asked the children to imitate other animals. Children sang songs and acted accordingly. The contents of the songs were related to the theme (animals) of the week. Chantelle gave instructions for the children to act as different animals.

Apart from giving instructions, she also added academic elements to the physical activity:

> The teacher [Chantelle] asked three children to get insects from a tray in which some insects and animals were mixed together, and each child individually needed to pick one of these [insect and animal models] and say if it was an insect or not [before the child could proceed to the next step of the game]. (Chantelle, field note, 29 February 2012)

Here Chantelle checks children's understanding of what has been discussed in circle time, in which she told the children… "the body of the insect has three parts – head, chest and abdomen" (Chantelle, field note, 29 February 2012). It was a way to add academic elements into the physical activity. Apart from the transition time between activities, all teachers added academic elements into non-academic activities. Another example comes from Yuki (thematic approach):

> [Yuki and the children were standing in the playground]. Yuki played a selling game with her class in a physical activity, in which children were in groups of three. There were eight groups in total. Each group had some fake HK money [coins with different values]. Yuki pretended she was selling food in a market. When she set the prices for the food, the children would need to pay the exact money for the food. For example, Yuki asked for 1.5 HK dollars for an egg, and group members had to find the exact coins or the right amount of money as soon

as possible in order to buy the egg. (Field note, 17 April 2012)

The field note shows how Yuki incorporated reinforcement of previously taught knowledge (the values of different coins) into the game. She took the opportunity to revise this math concept with the children. For Yuki, this may be what learning through play is about. Vygotsky (1978) asserts that, in play, children learn how to use objects and actions in their symbolic function, and the mastery of cultural signs and symbols promotes children's development of higher mental functions. Accordingly, play can enhance children's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). For Vygotsky (1978), real play had three main characteristics: first, children create a dramatic situation; they then take on and act out roles, and finally follow a set of rules which were restricted by specific roles. In this case, the teacher (Yuki) created the game and asked children to act out, and follow the rules of the game. The game might be fun to the children who were able to recognize and calculate the value of the coins. However, Grieshaber and McArdle (2010, p. 17) have written about the 'fun' business in play, "fun is a matter of feelings, and is coupled with feelings of pleasure and joy, self-esteem…". In view of that, it might not be fun for all children, especially for those like Ti in Yuki's class. It was observed that while:

… most children were excited and engaged in the selling game, some children looked bored and confused. Ti was standing in front of two group members, who

> were busy trying to find the right coins to buy the egg from the teacher [Yuki], looking at his peers [and doing nothing] as if he was only an on-looker [of the game]. (Yuki, field note, 17 April 2012)

The reason for Ti standing and taking no action could be that he did not know the values of different coins and thus was not able to help. In this case, the game may not be fun for Ti, and at worst, he might lose interest in learning. The learning activity seemed to lack the flexibility to give children like Ti opportunities to show what they can do. Moreover, although it was a physical activity in which the teacher should "provide sufficient exercise time for children to develop their gross and fine motor skills" (CDC, 2006, p. 25), the children were not in a physically active mode like running.

Instead, they stood in the playground patiently waiting for Yuki's requests and questions, and when they found the exact coins, they [one of them] then had a chance to take the coins and run to Yuki. It seems that Yuki took every opportunity to make connections with children's academic learning, even in physical activities, which are supposed to enable children to have some physical exercise. A balanced curriculum is essential for children's holistic development (Opper, 1992; Leung, 2012), however, striking a balance between academic and non-academic activities appears to be a consistent challenge for all four teachers in this study.

All teachers in this study stated in the interviews that they had free-play time in

their daily schedule. Free play periods in which children choose or initiate engagement in and interaction with a range of activities are a common feature of kindergarten and pre-school classrooms in many Western contexts (Bredekamp 1987, 1996). According to Siraj-Baltchford et al. (2002), free-play activities can enhance children's thinking. It is important for children have opportunities to choose for themselves as it helps them to get involved in activities (Levy, 2012), and choosing can enhance their communication skills and problem solving abilities (Bredekamp, 1987). According to Vygotsky (1962), children construct their own knowledge when they get help and support from the adults around them, and hence teachers need to take an active role in children's learning, which includes children's play time.

Despite all teachers stating that they had free play in the daily routine, observations showed that only Chantelle and Yuki's (thematic approach) classes actually had free-play time. Routinely, children in kindergartens have free-play time after they have finished their "class assignment" (Li, 2006 p. 43), such as homework or group/project work. Chantelle explained how children in her class could claim free-play time:

> …they [children] have to finish their homework, then they need to do their English workbook revisions. [They first spell the English words, then read the words], and they also need to revise the school song [as children need to sing it in Mandarin, which is not their mother tongue, in the graduation ceremony]. After

> completing these tasks, they can start their free-play time. They can choose their favourite toys or activities in the [learning] corners. If they have performed well behaviourally, they can do less [academic work] and have free-play time earlier. (Chantelle, interview 1, 21 February 2012)

The data revealed that all children needed to complete academic work, which is much valued by the teachers and parents, before they could start their free-play time. To Chantelle, free-play time could also be a tool by which she could encourage children's good behaviour. It was a precious commodity and it seemed that free-play for the children in classrooms in this study was not taken for granted, as it would be in some Western kindergarten classrooms. In Chantelle's classroom, children needed to earn free-play opportunities. First of all, they had to be quick in finishing homework or doing other group project work, and then they had to hurry to do their revisions. At the same time, they had to be well-behaved in such ways as working "quietly and nicely" in order to have a chance to choose a free-play activity (Chantelle, observation, 28 March 2012). This situation is congruent with what happened in the other three classrooms. There was a complex constellation of activities for young children to perform. This may be one of the reasons that not all children earned a chance to claim their free-play time. Accordingly, free-play time in these four classrooms was somewhat of an element of trade. It could be won or lost depending on different factors. Figure 5.10 shows a boy doing his revision

before he could have his free-play time while his classmate just opposite was enjoying her monkey toy at the same table.

Figure 5.10. A boy was doing his revision before he could claim his free-play time

For Yuki, free-play time was used as an extra session for academic work. She described her classroom situation and how she used it to squeeze in another academic session:

> When children finish their homework, they give it [homework] to me to check. They can then go the [learning] corners [as one of the free-play activities]… in recent years, [we have] a lot more new immigrant students [from mainland China, speaking Mandarin], I told the [immigrant] parents that I would try my best to teach their children. For example, I use free-play time [as additional time] to teach their children. But I tell the immigrant parents first, as I don't want them to think that I won't let their children have free-play t[immigrant children] 1 – 2 new words every day. I hope they can catch up [curriculum] as soon as possible. (Yuki, interview 1, 20 April 2012)

Yuki seemed very focused on children's academic learning, rather than their non-academic learning. When children first arrived in her classroom, Yuki's strategy was to assess them academically, and she would then try to find time to help them to 'catch up' in the curriculum, although it might be at the expense of the children's learning other skills, for example, social and language skills which can be enhanced in free-play, in which children interact with each other (Han, 2012).

The evidence from the data above shows that the teachers play a dominant role in children's learning activities, and that the children had little opportunity to make decisions and choices. In fact, the data reveals that all teachers in this study were concerned about children's academic learning, and that they showed different degrees of concern about children's academic work individually. That is, teachers paid more attention to children's academic work, and they initiated one-on-one teaching with individual children when needed.

The programs in the four classrooms contain both educationally and developmentally appropriate elements, as well as practices that may be considered educationally and developmentally inappropriate (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). By Western standards, teachers teaching five to six year old children very formal academic skills, such as writing sentences in English and Chinese and calculating numbers, would be considered to be providing developmentally inappropriate instruction (Leung, 2012).

The four teachers in this study assigned homework and workbooks/worksheets as extra homework on Friday or before other holidays so that the children would keep up their academic habits. The children had little chance to choose and plan their own activities, except during free-play time. Even though free-play was offered, not all children had the opportunity to engage in it due to multiple competing academic imperatives, such as the need to finish homework or to participate in inflexibly scheduled language lessons. The most plausible explanation for this situation centres on Chinese cultural and parental expectations, which focus on the paramount importance of children's academic success beginning in kindergarten (Leung et al., 2013; Li, 2006). While it is common to see children as young as three doing homework such as colouring pictures on a daily basis, it is not uncommon to observe some children aged four and five years having to do "spelling of difficult English words or composition of numbers" (Leung, 2012, p. 39). Such practices create pressure for children by expecting them to attain high standards in learning areas for which they may not be developmentally ready, and this ignores individual differences among children.

While it is useful to develop an understanding of academic and non-academic activities in classroom contexts using interview and observational data, it is even more important to considering the interactions of teachers and children is also important. The next section describes and analyses such interactions.

5.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has presented and discussed the curriculum and pedagogical practices of four teachers working in classrooms using the project and thematic approaches in four HK kindergarten classrooms. Three themes were identified: classroom environments, routines and activities.

Generally speaking, the routines and activities arrangements were planned and organized by the teachers. All teachers claimed that the time allocation of activities was flexible, although observations and interview data showed it depended on other constraints, such as the timing of Mandarin and English lessons. The classroom activities were divided into academic and non-academic subjects. The teachers were highly concerned about the children's academic progress. All teachers made use of every opportunity to enhance the children's academic skills by encouraging such activities as counting numbers while waiting for the rest room. Children needed to do homework every day, and they had extra homework, such as worksheets, to do over the weekends and during public holidays. All teachers created different activity corners to help children extend their learning. However, most corners involved quiet activities, which favoured purely academic work. Not all of the children had opportunities to play in the learning corners. Only those children who had finished their homework or the tasks of the day were allowed to choose their favourite corner. Children in the project classrooms

were not observed engaging in learning corners at all during the data collection period.

Chapter 6: Teacher-child Interactions

6.0 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter presents the findings and discussion in relation to teacher-child interactions in the four classrooms. This chapter follows the same pattern as Chapter 5 in that participant perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices identified in the chapter themes are also linked to the research and academic literature in a congruent presentation and discussion of the findings. Figure 6.1 presents an overview of the themes that will be presented and discussed in this chapter.

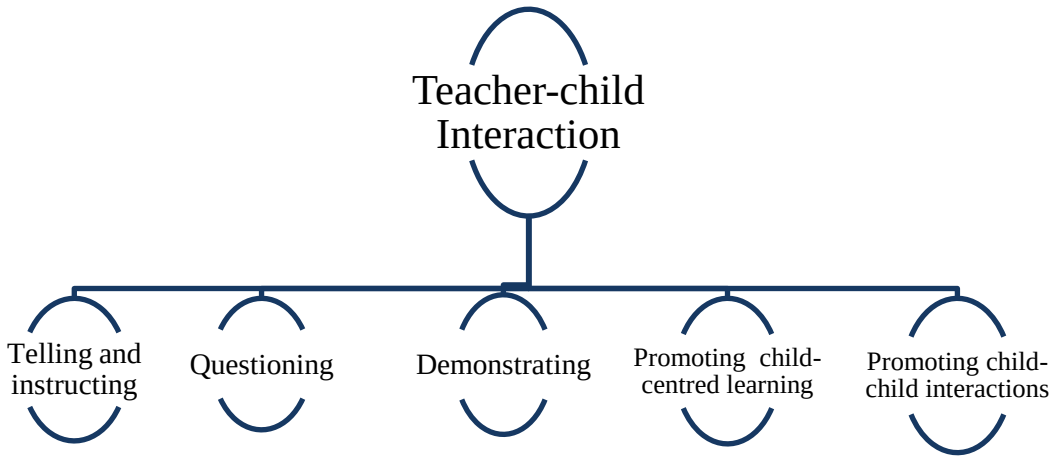

Figure 6.1. The types of teacher-child interactions in the four classrooms

The use of the term *teacher-child interactions* is deliberate. In many early childhood texts, the preferred term would be *child-teacher interactions* acknowledging children as the initiators and central focus in the classroom. In this study, however, in classroom interactions, there is very strong evidence that teachers were the main initiators of interactions with children, a feature of teacher-centred approaches. They instructed children what to do. As will become clear through the chapter, Miki and Lucy (project approach) asked many more thinking questions than Chantelle and Yuki (thematic approach), and Chantelle and Yuki's questions were mostly factual and related to what was taught in circle time. The children answered the questions passively.

6.1 TEACHER-CHILD INTERACTIONS

In early education environments, teacher-child interactions in the classroom are related to the children's social, emotional, and cognitive outcomes in early education environments (Anning & Edwards, 2010). Teacher-child interactions are not just verbal exchanges or Skinner's 'stimulus-response' events; they also reflect how teachers think about children's development and a teacher's personal goals for that development (Liu & Elicker, 2005). This section examines the types of interactions that occurred between teachers and children in the four classrooms.

The types of teacher-child interactions in this study involved telling and instructing,

questioning, demonstrating, promoting child-centred learning and promoting child-child interactions as shown in Figure 6.1.

6.1.1 Telling and Instructing

Observations showed that the teachers were keen to tell and instruct children what to do. As discussed in the previous chapter, all teachers tended to provide clear expectations before the start of an activity as a disciplinary strategy. Miki adopted telling and instructing as a teaching strategy, telling the class what to do before, during and after an experiment so as to make the teaching process smooth as is evident in the following excerpts: “Rabbit group, please tidy up and come to me and get ready for the experiment”; “Make sure you write down your report [as you are working], because you will have no time [to complete it later]”; “If you have finished, put your findings into a plastic bag” (Observation, 2012). The reason Miki regularly told children what to do could be due to the fact that there was only half an hour for project work in her classroom. Telling children what to do may save time as children make fewer errors and thus may complete the activity on time and achieve better outcomes. Although Lucy’s class had more project work time than Miki’s class, Lucy was still concerned about the limited time, as she explained:

> We have one hour and a half for the children to do project work. It seems quite a long time… but actually, time passes quickly and sometimes they [the children]

need to rush. After the project work, we have to do homework. (Lucy, interview 2, 22 March 2012)

Lucy was aware that time was important due to the tight schedule. After project work, children needed to do some homework before going home, so that they could complete it accurately at home. The other two teachers also engaged in these same methods of instruction.

According to Tu and Hsiao (2008), telling and instructing is a type of guidance that can have both positive and negative sides. A teacher's instruction is a one-way communication from the teacher to the child. Benefits, such as improving children's academic achievements and school-readiness, have been found when teachers use this strategy (Tu & Hsiao, 2008). Telling and instructing assists children in knowing what to do in classroom activities. However, it is contradictory to Developmentally Appropriate Practice (Bredekamp, 1987, 1996), which stresses that communication should happen through two-way conversations (Gillies, 2006). On the negative side, setting a routine and managing expectations correspond with directing the children, and the teacher's requests can reduce children's engagement in classroom activities (Rimm-Kaufman, LaParo, Downer, & Pianta, 2005). Similarly, for Da Ros-Voseles and Fowler-Haughey (2007), the development of social and intellectual dispositions in children may be impaired when they are too dependent on direct instructions from teachers.

Observations revealed that teachers' directions were explicit. They tended to tell and instruct children what to do. It has been suggested that teachers intended to improve children's work and above all, get things done quickly. In this study, most children did not have opportunities to think about how to improve work independently, which may create an orientation towards passive learning (Hamiloglu, 2012).

6.1.2 Questioning

Frequent teacher-child interactions using questioning were observed in this study. Table 6.1 shows the number of thinking questions that teachers asked during the observation period. Chantelle and Yuki (thematic approach) asked substantially fewer thinking questions than Lucy and Miki (project approach).

Table 6.1 Thinking Questions

	Thinking questions e.g., Why did that happen?
Thematic approach	
Chantelle	15
Yuki	16
Project approach	
Lucy	53
Miki	60

Observations of Chantell and Yuki's classes revealed that questions requiring thinking were asked 15 and 16 times respectively, while in Lucy and Miki these types of questions were asked 53 and 60 times respectively. All teachers asked thinking questions, although the frequency with which questioning was employed vaned considerably. The following

examples reveal details of some of the thinking questions used by Lucy and Miki: “When we do our homework, why can’t we use a calculator?” (Lucy, observation, 9 March 2012); “Why use a plastic bag to hold air?” (Miki, observation, 23 April 2012). Lucy and Miki seemed more aware of the importance of asking thinking questions, and the children in their classes were regularly exposed to such questions. Chantelle and Yuki (thematic approach) concentrated more on getting the children to recall previous experiences as the first step to extending knowledge. For example, “What does a goldfish look like?” (Chantelle, observation, 7 March 2012); “What would you do if your mum is not at home?” (Yuki, observation, 10 May 2012).

Teachers’ questions can be a way to assess children’s learning, as questions help to link the present topic with previous learning and thus stimulate children’s cognitive development (Hamiloglu, 2012). Accordingly, teachers’ questions can be seen as “the most powerful device to lead, extend and control communication in the classroom” (Hamiloglu, 2012, p. 2). Asking questions is a vital component of teaching strategies which contributes optimistic outcomes for children (Tu & Hsiao, 2008). To ask stimulating and supporting questions (such as Lucy’s question: “Why can’t you use a calculator?”) might help children improve problem-solving skills and thus help children develop their own understanding (Gillies & Khan, 2009). The value of thinking questions for developing problem-solving abilities has been discussed by Wilhelm (2014) as “[a]

powerful [tool] ... [that] commit[s] students to the processes of creative and critical thinking through inquiry" (p. 38). Children's answers to thinking questions require reactions that bring together their various forms of knowledge construction (Wilhelm, 2014). Therefore, before asking thinking questions, teachers need to consider of their questioning purposes. Table 6.2 shows that the four teachers' questioning purposes were designed mainly to assess the children's learning progress and their completion of tasks.

Table 6.2 Questioning related to Children's Progress and Completion of Tasks in the Four Classrooms

	Questioning related to children's progress and completion of tasks (e.g. What are you doing?)
Thematic approach	
Chantelle	6
Yuki	13
Project approach	
Lucy	29
Miki	16

The purpose of teachers' questions was mostly associated with assessing children's progress in learning and tracking the completion of tasks which the children were undertaking. As shown in Table 6.2, Chantelle and Yuki (thematic approach) asked fewer questions (6 and 13 respectively) than Lucy and Miki (project approach) (29 and 16 times respectively). The reason could be that children in Chantelle's class were involved in a thematic program in which it was assumed that the teacher plans all learning activities. Therefore, Chantelle already knew how the progression of the activities would unfold, and she did not need to ask the children in order to know what they were doing or to

gauge their progress. Alternatively, the children in Lucy's class were involved in a project approach, in which the children had more opportunities to contribute to the learning activities undertaken. Therefore, Lucy seemed to want to know about children's progress and asked questions to determine her next steps. According to Hamiloglu (2012), teachers can access children's understandings by asking appropriate questions that can pinpoint specific needs and future directions. Lucy demonstrated how she assisted children's on-task progress and needs by asking questions:

> A group of children in Lucy's class was carrying a big paper box and moving around the classroom. They appeared not to know how to get started. Lucy asked [the group], "What are you going to do with this [paper box]"? The children explained they wanted to make a marble drawing box. Lucy asked "What materials do you need to use"? "Who can help to get those materials"? (Field note, 15 March 2012)

As observed, Lucy responded to the children's behaviour. She used different questions to stimulate the children's thinking, helping them to start a task. Chantelle and Yuki (thematic approach) asked other questions to assess the children's understanding of the teaching content. Table 6.3 shows examples of content questions that Chantelle and Yuki asked in whole class situations.

Table 6.3 Examples of Content Questions asked by Chantelle and Yuki

Questioners		Examples of content questions
Chantelle	1.	What is this? Have you seen this before?
	2.	Which group will go faster, the blue group or the yellow group?
	3.	Apart from the train, what else?
Yuki	1.	Have you tried to use these methods to chat to people?
	2.	What polite words can we say when we talk to people on the phone?
	3.	What has the monkey received for his birthday?

The teachers' usual practice at the end of circle time was to ask questions to check if the children had understood what had been discussed during circle time. These questions were mostly factual and asked children to recall previously learnt knowledge. The questions were to find out what children already knew and focused on a central theme. Taking the above questions from Yuki as an example, she asked specific questions based on a central theme of how to communicate with other people. The questions are not particularly cognitively demanding and may not require children to use higher-level thinking (Hamiloglu, 2012). As Hamiloglu (2012) explains, such questions might put children in a "passive information seeker-receiver position in the class" (p. 6), and are unlikely to stimulate higher levels of thinking. When teachers stress factual and recall responses, it might give the children the impression that teachers want to identify the person who knows the answers (Wragg & Brown, 2001). That is, teacher questions can appear to be an oral test to check if the children had concentrated during the lessons, rather than a means by which to generate a meaningful conversation to enhance children's thinking skills.

The data indicated that all teachers asked different types of thinking questions. While Miki and Lucy (project approach) were more focused on asking thinking questions of a type that might help the children to develop problem-solving skills, Chantelle and Yuki (thematic approach) asked questions which were mainly factual and topic-related to determine whether children were on task. Apart from using questioning as a means to enhance children's learning, the teachers also used demonstration as part of their teacher-child interactions.

6.1.3 Demonstrating

According to MacNaughton and Williams (2009), demonstration "shows how something is done" (p. 46). For example, a teacher may demonstrate how to cut an apple with a plastic knife. Table 6.4 shows the number of times the four teachers used demonstrations during the observation period.

Table 6.4 Number of Times Teachers used Demonstrations in Whole Class and Small Group Situations

	Number of demonstrations	Examples
Thematic approach		
Chantelle	10	e.g., teacher demonstrates how to jump like a rabbit
Yuki	7	e.g., teacher demonstrates how to play a game of selling toys
Project approach		
Lucy	13	e.g., teacher demonstrates how to calculate (4+1=5)
Miki	28	e.g., teacher demonstrates how to use a scale to measure the weight of balloons

The observations showed that Lucy and Miki (project approach) used more demonstrations (13 and 28 times respectively) in teaching than Chantelle and Yuki (10 and 7 times respectively).All the teachers' demonstrations were related to the techniques of using tools and the procedures for tasks and games. For example, Lucy was observed demonstrating how to do the calculations for a marble game, and Miki demonstrated how to use a scale to measure balloons in an air experiment. In these cases, the teachers worried that children did not know how to use a scale and to make the calculations properly. Such examples are designed to provide clear explanations to the children (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett, & Farmer, 2008). To Bandura's (1989), such modelling and imitating provide opportunities for children to learn skills and methods. Children learn faster by simply observing how other people handle tasks (Bandura, 1977).

However, from a Piagetian perspective, adults demonstrating processes for children using objects may result in loss of the value that is available through the children's active involvement with the objects. Piaget (1970) emphasised that children gain more understanding by actually interacting with objects and materials than by simply viewing teachers' or other children's demonstrations. According to Piaget (1970), children's cognitive development is stimulated by direct exploration of materials around them. Therefore, it follows that a potentially stronger alternative would be for teachers to provide materials for children to explore instead of giving a direct demonstration or

leading the activity with children passively looking on.

It seems that both theories (cognitive constructivism and social learning theory) have differences in the ways they conceptualise children's learning. This is part of the complexity of teaching: Teachers must know how to assist children to learn and try to apply appropriate theories rather than following a single theory of learning when teaching children in the classroom.

6.1.4 Promoting Child-centred Learning

In their interviews, all four teachers claimed they agreed with the notion of child-centred learning. For example, Chantelle (thematic approach) pointed out the advantages of child-centred learning: Child-centred learning is good. It is easier for the children to learn. Children will engage more in the activities, and the relationships between children and teacher will be better, especially for K3 children (Chantelle, interview 1, 21 February 2012). Yuki (thematic approach) explained her views about child-centred learning: it is good to be child-centred, but I feel that there is not always enough time. Three hours is not enough to let children to discover knowledge (Yuki, interview 1, 20 April 2012). While Yuki (thematic approach) mentioned that the lack of time created difficulties for conducting child-centred learning, she had suggestions for such a problem: you need to look at the situations. You cannot spend a long time [for using a child-centred approach].

For example, teaching routines and homework can be teacher-centred, while other activities, such as discussion, can be child-centred. (Yuki, interview 1, 20 April 2012).

The teachers attempted to promote child-centred learning, although some teachers emphasised it more than the others. Table 6.5 displays summary data on teachers' pedagogical practices in terms of promoting child-centred learning in the classroom.

Table 6.5 Promoting Child-Centred Learning in the Classroom

	Children have freedom to express their ideas in circle time		Emphasizing the importance of a democratic environment	
	Number of times	Examples	Number of times	Examples
Thematic approach				
Chantelle	7	e.g., Children can express themselves freely during circle time	2	e.g., 'It would be better to let a girl try as well'
Yuki	5	e.g., A child has a chance to express his view about shopping	3	e.g., 'Let him choose'
Project approach				
Lucy	23	e.g., Children have chances to suggest activities on the weekends	9	e.g., Children vote for their favourite game
Miki	43	e.g., Children have a chance to express their views about what to play with	5	e.g., Children have a chance to vote on who should be the leader

The importance of language, adult assistance, and interactions in the learning process have been highlighted by Vygotsky (1986). Generally speaking, children in this study had opportunities to express their views during circle time although expressing one's own thoughts and feelings is not encouraged by Confucianism (Heyman, 2008). Table 6.5 shows that Lucy and Miki (project approach) provided the children many more

opportunities (23 and 43 respectively) to express their views than Chantelle and Yuki (thematic approach) did. It seemed that the project classrooms had more freedom in terms of opportunities for children to speak publicly. As mentioned before, teachers who used a thematic approach had arranged all learning activities for the children, and thus the children had few, if any opportunities to make suggestions about what to do or how to work at tasks in a group and during project activity time. In the thematic classrooms, time was a big concern as the tight schedules usually did not allow time for the children to make suggestions or to explore things during circle time. Overrunning circle time meant a reduction in the amount of time for other learning activities.

In terms of verbal interactions, the literature suggests that children should be encouraged to experience the richness of verbal interactions with peers and adults. Conversations such as adult-child interactions are important for children's social development (Vygotsky, 1978). To be able to express views in front of the whole class is important for children's intellectual development and critical thinking (Crain, 2011). It also relates to democracy, which involves having a say or asking a question in the class community. Accordingly, to miss chances of experiencing such social discourse seems to compromise learning and teaching opportunities. However, as observed (Table 6.5), teachers put little emphasis on the importance of a democratic environment (such as children voting for their favourite game). It might relate to Confucianism's idea of

stressing teachers' authority. It seems that Lucy and Miki (project approach) were slightly more concerned with creating a democratic environment than their counterparts.

Teachers were aware of child-centred approaches to teaching. They provided different opportunities for the children to express their ideas with significantly more opportunities provided by Lucy and Miki (project approach). There was little evidence of emphasizing the importance of a democratic environment in any of the classrooms (See Table 6.5).

6.1.5 Promoting Child-child Interactions

This section discusses how the four teachers promoted child-child interactions. Table 6.6 illustrates the types of child-child interactions and number of times the four teachers promoted child-child interactions in their classrooms during the observation period. All teachers encouraged children's verbal exchanges. The two project teachers, and especially Lucy, were keen to encourage children to exchange ideas on different occasions. The following excerpt showed how this occurred on one occasion in Lucy's class. Lucy discovered some marks on a piece of paper; she asked a group of children to share what the marks meant and to explain the reason why they made them to the other groups (Lucy, field note, 22 March 2012). Teachers should encourage children to have regular dialogues and discussions where all of the children can be heard. In discussions with other peers, children have a better chance to "deal with different viewpoints as

Table 6.6 Types of Child-Child Interaction and Number of Times the Four Teachers Promoted Child-Child Interactions

	Encouraging children's verbal exchanges (teacher encourages children to have a verbal exchange with peers)		Opportunities for interactive skills (teacher provides a chance or place for children to interact with each other through activities)		Collaboration, interaction and relationships encouraged	
	Number of times	Examples	Number of times	Examples	Number of times	Examples
Thematic approach						
Chantelle	24	e.g., 'You can tell your story to Mei'	8	e.g., children work together to measure a paper strip	26	e.g., 'Can anybody help her? She needs help'
Yuki	27	e.g., 'Why don't you ask Tony to sing with you?'	12	e.g., children have chance to talk and read books together	17	e.g., 'Good to see you girls helping each other'
Project approach						
Lucy	69	e.g., 'Ask your partner what to do'	27	e.g., children talk to each other during snack time	35	e.g., 'You may choose someone to help you to move the chair outside the classroom'
Miki	39	e.g., 'Read aloud to the person next to you'	25	e.g., children cooperate to put air into the balloon	30	e.g., 'We can share the biscuits. We are good friends'

stimulating challenges to their own thinking" (Crain, 2011, p. 145). Verbal exchange is important in developing critical thinking (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky (1978), language and thinking development are closely connected and thus, these interactive conversations and discussions can also build up children's confidence and communication skills. Teachers made use of many opportunities to enhance children's interactive skills (Table 6.6). However, Lucy and Miki (project approach) appeared to

provide the children with more opportunities to engage in interactive skills than their counterparts, Chantelle and Yuki (thematic approach).What follows shows how Lucy encouraged a child to use interactive skills:

> A boy was drawing a picture. A girl came along and commented that the picture was nice. Since the child who was drawing the picture made no response [he did not hear his peer's comment], Lucy encouraged the girl to go near the boy and say it again. The boy looked at the girl and smiled at her. Lucy encouraged the boy to say 'thank you'. (Lucy, field note, 22 March 2012)

As observed, Lucy encouraged children to interact, communicate and appreciate each other's efforts. She also helped children to gain interactive skills by guiding them to do so. In promoting child-child interaction, the data also showed that all teachers encouraged children's collaboration, interaction and relationships. Lucy and Miki (Table 6.6) did this more than Chantelle. A field note highlights such an example from Chantelle:

> Chantelle asked a boy [whose mother tongue is Mandarin] to be a little teacher to help another two boys [whose mother tongue is Cantonese] to read a poem in Mandarin. Chantelle asked the two boys to say thank you to 'Teacher Pak" [the little teacher's name] afterwards. (Chantelle, field note, 7 March 2012)

Lucy and Chantelle intentionally taught children to collaborate and build relationships. Such skills are essential as they can help children develop social competence (Anning &

Edwards, 2010). The zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) undoubtedly illuminates the significance of social interaction between adults and peers in the construction of children's knowledge. Children's existing skills can be moved to the next level with the help and support of teachers and other, more able peers. Figure 6.2 shows a boy whose mother tongue is Mandarin teaching another boy whose mother tongue is Cantonese how to pronounce the words in Mandarin. The observations revealed that scaffolding was encouraged and it was taking place in all of the classrooms observed.

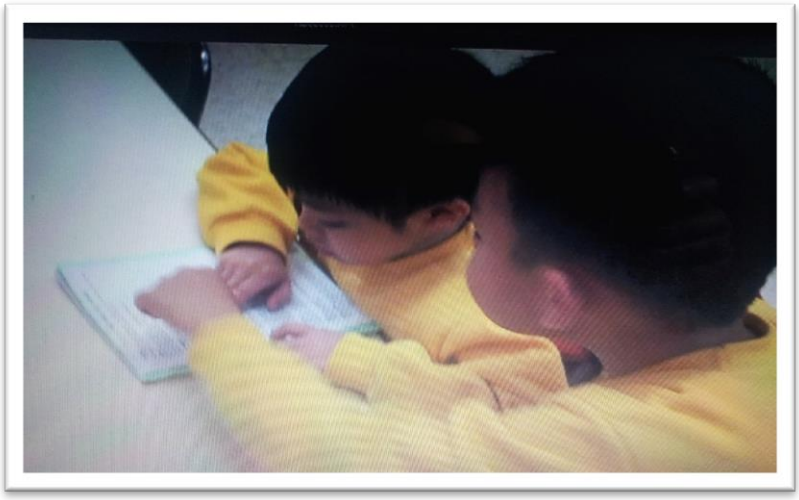

Figure 6.2. A boy was teaching another boy to pronounce the words in Mandarin

6.2 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented findings in relation to teacher-child interaction in the four classrooms. It also explored the types of teacher-child interactions that were most prevalent in the classrooms: telling and instructing; questioning; demonstrating; promoting child-centred learning and promoting child-child interactions. The data

indicates that teachers were the main initiators of interactions with children. Teachers used to tell children what to do so as to get things done quickly. Teachers also used questioning to interact with children, however, the questions required more factual recall than thinking, and children usually answered the questions passively. Such interactions seemed to provide few opportunities for the children to think and solve problems independently, which might encourage passive learning.

Generally speaking, all teachers encouraged children to interact with each other in terms of verbal exchanges. However, Lucy and Miki (project approach) gave more opportunities for children to gain such experiences than their counterparts, Chantelle and Yuki (thematic approach). While knowing how teachers interact with children in the classroom is important for understanding teachers' curriculum and pedagogical practices, approaches towards classroom discipline are another important aspect. Thus the next chapter discusses discipline in relation to children's self-help skills, and classroom rules in particular.

Chapter 7: Discipline: Children's Self-help Skills and Classroom Rules

7.0 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter describes and discusses the discipline aspect of the findings. It starts with definitions of the terms discipline, discipline strategy and self-help skills. It provides a brief summary of the four teachers' (Chantelle, Yuki, Lucy and Miki) discipline aspects. The topic of discipline in classrooms has surfaced as one of the most challenging in teaching today (Hue, 2007). One of the main challenges confronting teachers is how to keep students engaged and attentive. The need for such a classroom climate is derived from the realities of classroom conditions, in which teachers have to handle different demands such as parental expectations, time constraints, tight schedules, class sizes, and school environments and resources. As a result, teachers are likely to control classes so as to achieve an orderly classroom which can meet their practical demands. In Hong Kong (HK), some research (e.g. Hue, 2007; Tam, 2009) has examined the views of educators concerning classroom discipline and the difficulties that they face while establishing or implementing classroom discipline and rules. These studies have also provided insights regarding the characteristics of classroom discipline. Internationally, the majority of studies on classroom discipline focus mainly on discipline and rules in primary and

secondary schools; studies focusing directly on classroom discipline in kindergartens are limited. This chapter adds to a small but growing body of research about kindergarten teachers' views and classroom practices with regard to discipline.

As was the case in Chapters 5 and 6, data for this chapter were obtained from field notes, individual interviews and non-participant observations with four teachers in the four kindergarten classrooms. Different classroom activities related to discipline were observed, as were their duration, and the discipline methods adopted. Three major findings emerged in the area of discipline: self-help skills, rules and discipline strategies. Figure 7.1 shows the three major themes in the area of discipline along with subthemes that were identified. The chapter discusses each in turn and ends with a summary.

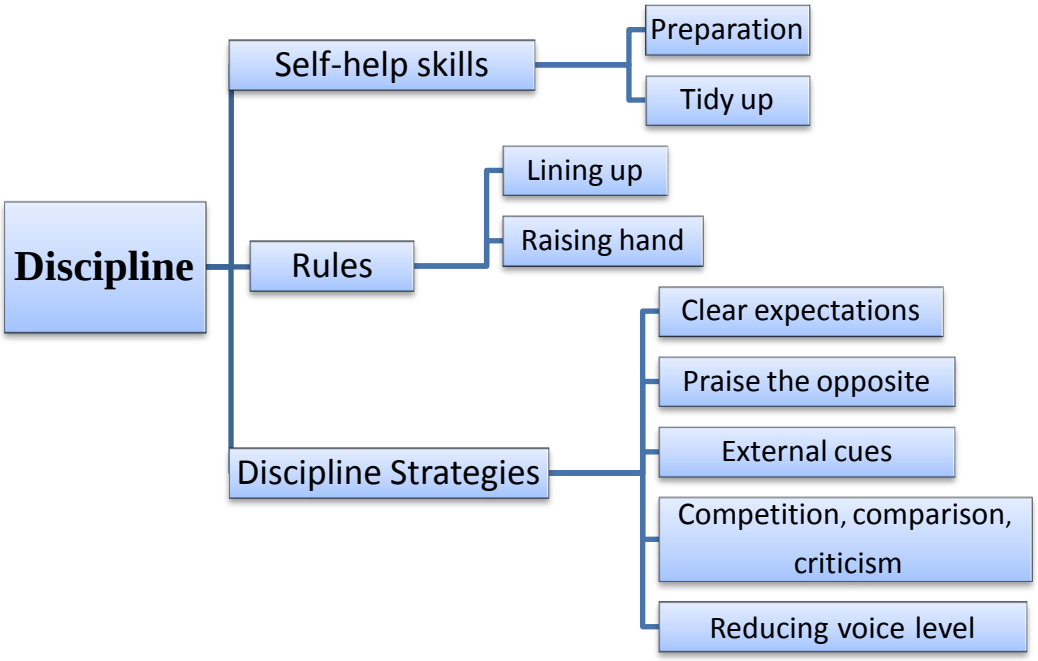

Figure 7.1. Discipline: Three major findings

7.1 DEFINING DISCIPLINE

The terms discipline, discipline strategies and self-help skills are used in this chapter, and are now explained. Discipline is commonly considered a reaction to children's undesirable behaviour (Essa, 2014). It is one of teachers' main responsibilities (Erden & Wolfgang, 2004), requiring the application of guidance strategies to assist children to learn self-discipline, act properly and be accountable for their own behaviour (Gordon & Browne, 2014). Discipline strategies refer to the techniques which are used by teachers to develop children's self-discipline (Bear, 2010). Examples include external cues (e.g. using the sound of a tambourine as a signal for children to tidy up), 'praise the opposite' (e.g. teacher praises the well behaved child as a model for the misbehaving child to follow), and guiding children to enact desirable behaviour. Essa (2014) defines self-help as involving feeding, dressing, cleaning, organizing materials for different activities and tiding up after activities as skills that need to be mastered in the early years.

7.2 TEACHER APPROACHES TO DISCIPLINE

This section provides a snapshot of the discipline approaches used by Chantelle (thematic approach), Lucy (project approach), Miki (project approach), and Yuki (thematic approach). It highlights the four teachers' discipline practices in relation to children's self-help skills and classroom rules. It also revealed the significance of

teachers' specific discipline strategies such as clapping hands and ringing bells used in the classrooms.

7.2.1 Chantelle (Thematic Approach)

Chantelle cared about discipline in every aspect of classroom activities and put great effort into maintaining it. There were 29 children in Chantelle's class. At circle time she requested all children to sit in front of her and listen to what she had to say. The children had to be quiet, attentive and sit still with their hands in their laps. In most cases, the children had to raise their hands to answer questions, and to show interest in participating in specific classroom activities. During physical activity time, she insisted that the children follow her instructions step by step. At snack time, she expected the children to sit and wait patiently for their turn to get their snacks. In music time, the children had to follow her specific instructions such as listening to music and clapping their hands in a special pattern. During free-play time, generally speaking, the children could do whatever they liked or talk to their peers freely, provided that they did not speak too loudly. Lining up was a very common practice on all occasions in Chantelle's classroom, as the children had to line up to take part in classroom activities. Once in a while, the children were required to rest their heads on the table while waiting for the next activity.

According to the observation guide, Chantelle had clear expectations about children's behaviour. Children were expected to "take care of themselves whenever possible so as to practise their self-help skills" (Chantelle, interview 1, 17 February 2012). She used discipline techniques and external cues like ringing a bell to attract the children's attention and to maintain appropriate behaviour. However, on some occasions, she stopped the activities and requested the children to follow the rules directly. In general, the children responded well to her requests.

In terms of the classroom environment, Chantelle arranged the classroom in an orderly way. Quiet areas were separated from active areas, although most corners were quiet in nature. Quiet areas included the book, computer, art, science and language corners, while the active corner was the doll corner. Rules printed in Chinese and displayed on the walls in different corners reminded children to obey them. Different corners had their own rules. According to the interview conversations, Chantelle explained that she set up the rules with the children at the beginning of the school year.

7.2.2 Yuki (Thematic Approach)

Yuki had very clear expectations about children's behaviour. Children had to perform self-care duties whenever necessary. She constantly reminded them about the rules, such as lining up to wait for their turn to play on the slide, and stated the consequences of breaking the rules. Yuki had a strategy that was not used by Chantelle.

Yuki insisted that children listen to her when she talked to them. That meant they had to look at her and respond to her questions accordingly. On many occasions, children needed to raise their hands to answer questions or show interest in taking turns at different classroom activities. In most cases, they had to line up for changing or taking part in classroom activities. Every so often, Yuki reminded them to follow the rules. For example, she said "would the 'Apple group' please talk in a low voice?" There were four groups in Yuki's class. Occasionally, Yuki stopped children's undesirable behaviour by discontinuing the whole group's activity.

Yuki set up the classroom rules according to the school's discipline guidelines (Yuki, interview 1, 16 April 2012). Although sometimes she discussed the rules with children and explained the reasons for setting up the rules, Yuki had her own ideas about carrying out classroom discipline. According to the interview conversations, she set up the rules at the beginning of the school year. As observed, Yuki constantly told the children what was the right thing to do. For example, when a child was lining up quietly, she would say something like "Tak Tak, lining up without talking is good." According to the interview conversations, Yuki used discipline techniques such as "praise the opposite" to encourage children to behave well. In classroom arrangement, Yuki separated the corners into quiet and active areas. There were two active corners: toy and theme corners. The other five learning corners (book, nature, art, maths and English) were quiet in nature.

In line with the amount of space dedicated to quiet activities, it seemed that Yuki placed a higher emphasis on quiet activities than the noisier active activities in the classroom. Similarly to Chantelle, Yuki also adopted the practice of assigning and displaying different rules in different corners to remind children to follow the rules.

7.2.3 Lucy (Project Approach)

In the interview conversations, Lucy appeared quite concerned about classroom discipline. She "set up the classroom rules with the children at the beginning of the school year" (Lucy, interview 1, 1 March 2012). The observation guide indicated that on most occasions, Lucy had clear expectations about children's behaviour. Children had to raise their hands to answer questions and to show interest in taking turns in classroom activities. They also needed to ask permission to use the bathroom. On many occasions, children needed to line up to change from one activity to the next. Lucy used external cues such as clapping her hands to draw children's attention if necessary, and she also stopped the activities to reinstate good behaviour. However, Lucy's use of discipline techniques seemed to be flexible because she used them according to different situations.

Lucy was also concerned about children's self-help skills. Children were "expected to take care of themselves and others" (Lucy, interview 2, 22 March 2012). For instance, children needed to get biscuits for themselves at snack time and tidy up after snacking. They seemed to be competent in using their self-care skills. It was observed that they

could take care of themselves and others without the help of adults. For example, they were able to pour water from a big bottle into their small cups. In informal conversations, Lucy indicated that children were taught how to take care of themselves and others from the first day of kindergarten. Lucy and the children had already been together since K1, that is, for two years, with K3 being the third. According to Lucy, "the children knew each other very well and they treated each other like family members" (Lucy, interview 1, 1 March 2012). In fact, it was observed that Lucy was warm with children, for example, she was friendly and approachable and every now and then she encouraged them to be nice to each other.

In terms of the classroom environment, Lucy had arranged the classroom in an orderly way. Quiet areas were separated from the active areas, although most corners were quiet in nature. There were rules displayed on the wall of each learning corner, which were written by the children in Chinese characters, with the aim of reminding them to obey the rules.

7.2.4 Miki (Project Approach)

Miki had very clear expectations about children's behaviour. In most cases, Miki insisted that children had to be well behaved when participating in project activities. They needed to line up when changing to the next activity and ask permission to use the bathroom. In general, children had to raise their hands to show interest in participating in

classroom activities and sometimes to answer questions. Miki interacted with them in a friendly manner. Children talked to Miki in a casual way and sometimes they did not raise their hands to answer questions. As observed, if there were many children wanting to talk at the same time, they needed to raise their hands in order to let their opinions be heard by other children (Miki, observation, 30 April 2012). Otherwise, they could just state their views without raising their hands. It seemed that Miki was concerned about discipline and, at the same time, was relaxed and sociable with the children.

As observed, Miki paid attention to sustaining classroom discipline (Field note, 17 April 2012). On many occasions, Miki tried strategies such as "praise the opposite" (e.g. Miki sometimes praised children for waiting patiently for their turn to play games) and encouragement as guidance or discipline techniques. Miki occasionally used external cues such as clapping her hands to maintain good behaviour. Enforced quietness, for example, verbal requests to reduce voice levels was also in evidence in Miki's classroom. Miki stopped activities for everyone if children did not respond after being warned. In most cases, Miki stopped the whole group activity even if only one or a minority of the group members were not following the rules. This approach could be a reflection of Chinese collective culture (Phuong-Mai, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2005; Yan, 2000) where individuals share the failure and success of the group and thus they are undividable. In other words, children must learn to be well behaved since all group members should take responsibility

for misconduct. This kind of collective punishment may be used to encourage children's group sense and the value of group honour, which are prized in Chinese collective culture.

Miki mentioned in one interview that the classroom rules were discussed and set up with the children at the beginning of the school year. However, Miki also emphasized that they "needed to follow the teacher's guidelines when setting up the classroom rules" (Miki, interview, 13 April, 2012). Like Chantelle and Yuki, Miki was also concerned about children's self-help skills. Miki expected children to perform self-help skills (e.g. putting their homework into their backpacks) and they were good at looking after themselves and their peers. For example, they helped each other to zip up plastic bags (Miki, observation, 27 March 2012). The arrangement of low shelves helped children to carry out self-help tasks without adult assistance. They could get whatever materials were needed for different classroom activities. Both Miki and Lucy used a project approach and had children create the rules with teachers. Rules were displayed on the walls. Children in these two project classrooms therefore had opportunities to participate in classroom rule making. In Miki's classroom, the rules were written by the children and when displayed on the walls of some corners could be seen easily, serving as a visual reminder. Miki had set up the classroom in such a way that children could take work independently and follow the rules as required.

All four teachers, Chantelle (thematic approach), Lucy (project approach), Miki (project approach), and Yuki (thematic approach) were concerned about children's classroom discipline and rules, and self-help skills. Although their teaching practices were somehow different from each other in terms of child-centred approach from each other, the teachers' concern about children's discipline and rules, self-help skills and academic skills were similar. As noted in the chapter overview, three major findings emerged in the data in relation to discipline: self-help skills, rules and discipline strategies. Findings for teach theme will be presented in turn with a congruent discussion linking the findings to the literature.

7.3 CHILDREN'S SELF-HELP SKILLS

This section examines the data from the observation guide, interviews and field notes on the issue of self-help skills in relation to discipline. The types of self-help skills recorded in the four kindergarten classrooms were noted or observed to be mainly focused on preparation and tidying up before and after classroom activities. Table 7.1 shows the main types of self-help skills which were required of children and observed in the four classrooms.

In the two thematic classrooms, children were required to use similar self-help skills (See Table 7.1). Chantelle's class was required to use self-help skills most of the time and

on a variety of occasions. For example, children had to prepare materials for different activities and tidy up after, which included group work, snack time and circle time. It was

Table 7.1 Types of Self-Help Skills in the Four Classrooms

	Preparation			Tiding up					Grooming and hygiene	
	Get ready for snack	Move tables, chairs	Prepare materials for different activities	Clean up snack table	Return unused materials	Move tables, chairs after use	Take art work to dry and display	Put things in schoolbag	Wash hands before and after activities	Take off shoes before activities, put on after activities
Thematic approach										
Chantelle	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	✓
Yuki	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x
Project approach										
Lucy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Miki	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x

observed that the children took off and put on their shoes before and after some activities which required taking off shoes (Chantelle, observation, 2 March 2012). Children in Yuki's class also had to carry out self-help skills by collecting and organising materials, homework and worksheets for their work.

Children in Lucy and Miki's classes were also required to carry out self-help skills. All children had to take care of themselves in terms of classroom activities. For example, there were no special snack times in the two project classrooms; children had to help themselves to a snack, and they had to find time during the group/project work time to have their snack. In Lucy's class, the group leaders needed to organize the tables and chairs in the classroom. Group leaders' main duties were to serve their group members with minor things during school day (Lucy, observation, 1 March 2012).

This involved moving the tables and chairs around according to the requirements of the project work time. For example, the next activity might not need to have tables in the classroom, so children needed to move the tables out of the classroom. The group leaders also needed to reorganize the tables and chairs after the project work time. After art activities, children in Lucy's class also needed to take art work to dry outside the classroom. In Miki's class, "children were required to get themselves chairs for attending circle time and put them back afterwards" (Field note, 27 April 2012). They also needed to put unused materials back after project work time. In sum, the children in these two

classes were required to use self-help skills in different areas, and the data suggest that all teachers stressed the importance of children using self-help skills.

Using the observation guide, the number of times children were required to use self-help skills was calculated for each teacher in the four classrooms from February to May 2012 (Table7.2). Table 7.2 shows that Chantelle paid more attention to children's self-help skills than her counterparts. There were 52 occasions when children were required to

Table 7.2 Number of Times Children were required to use Self-help Skills

	Number of times
Thematic approach	
Chantelle	52
Yuki	40
Project approach	
Lucy	38
Miki	28

exercise self- help skills (e.g. tying their own shoes) within the 12 hours that her class was observed. Observations of Yuki's class revealed 40 occasions, with Lucy's class recording 38 occasions and Miki's class 28 occasions. All teachers seemed to be concerned about children's classroom discipline in terms of self-help skills and required them to use a variety of self-help skills.

The teachers using thematic approaches required the children to use self-help skills more than the teachers using project approaches. However, one interesting observation is that while Yuki (thematic approach) and Lucy (project approach) had similar numbers of requests for children to use self-help skills, Chantelle (thematic

approach) had the highest score and Miki (project approach) had the lowest scores among the teachers. Although Miki recorded the least number of times of requesting children to use self-help skills, it does not mean that she valued children's self-care skills less than her counterparts. As she explained in the first interview:

> Children's self-help skills are important; children need them to move to primary school, secondary school, university and even into society. We need to help children to build them [self-help skills] up. In our school, we train them [self-help skills] from K1. The simplest is the most important… the basic is toileting, snacking and drinking, and we encourage K1 children to pour water for themselves, to manage their snack, learn how to be a group leader, and how to tidy up. Do the most basic everyday tasks first. From K2, children have to learn how to serve others, as they had already learnt how to take care of themselves. And now they can have better group leaders; they can start to serve others such as taking snacks, and taking materials and tools for different activities. K3 children have an even bigger mission: they can take the learnt skills home. What else you can do… extend these self-help skills to their families, through doing these everyday tasks to raise their self-help skills. (Miki, interview 2, 9 May 2012)

This excerpt reveals that Miki is aware that children's self-help skills are important in preparing children for future life, from primary schooling and university to society in general. Miki intended to help children to gain self-help skills in a systematic manner, that is, children had opportunities to practise different levels of self-help skills from K1 to

K3 in kindergarten. As Miki's class was K3, a smooth transition to primary school appeared to be her next goal. In fact, all teachers in the interviews made it clear that discipline, which included self-help skills, was important for children's future primary school life, and thus children needed to "possess the skills before moving to the primary school" (Lucy, interview 2, 22 March 2012).

Helping children to get ready for primary schooling (P1) seemed to be a main concern of the teachers in this study. When children in HK are promoted to primary school, they are expected to possess certain self-help skills, which enable them to be independent. These expectations relate to the examples that follow. For example, in Chantelle's class, children tidied up the doll corner after playing (Field note, 29 February 2012); in Yuki's class, children poured water from a water bottle into their cups and passed the bottle to the next child (Field note, 7 March 2012); in Lucy's class, children put things back in their original places after project work (Field note, 1 March 2012) and in Miki's class, children put their own drawing into a plastic bag, so that their pictures could be hung up (Field note, 27 April 2012). All these examples indicated that all of the teachers, one way or another, treated self-help skills as essential for preparing children for the transition to primary school.

However, Wong (2003) and Chan (2012) point out that there are some discrepancies between kindergarten and P1 teachers' ideas about which skills are essential for primary schooling. For example, primary teachers were more concerned

about children's classroom discipline and pre-academic achievement than the kindergarten teachers. These differences have been considered as potentially impeding children's adaption to school (Chow, 1993; Chan, 2012). That is, children are expected to master some basic level of self-help skills before they enter primary school. As a result, the kindergarten teachers in this study were preparing children to adapt to the demands of primary school in terms of discipline, in which following rules and being independent by practising self-help skills was emphasized. For example, Lucy insisted that the children in her class needed to follow the classroom rules when answering questions in circle time: "I will invite those who sit nicely"; "one by one, see who is the first to raise their hands" (Lucy, observation, 9 March 2012). While Lucy demonstrated how she maintained the classroom rules, observations in Yuki's classroom showed how self-help skills were used to develop independence in her classroom:

> It was snack time in Yuki's classroom. The children were pouring water for themselves. A child had spilt some water on the table accidently. He went to get a piece of cloth to wipe the table without the teacher's hints or instructions. Yuki looked at him and said 'good boy'. (Yuki, observation, 27 April 2012)

After observing these actions Yuki praised the boy as a positive reinforcement with the view that such reinforcement can "assist children's learning" (MacNaughton, 2003 p. 26). In HK appears vital that children learn these skills that are essential for transitioning to primary school.

Apart from the smooth transition to primary school, another reason for the teachers' concern about children's self-help skills may be related to the development of children's self-discipline. Elsewhere, Bear (2005) stated that developing self-discipline avoids and corrects children's misbehaviour, thus teaching children to be responsible for their behaviour and to feel a sense of responsibility. Teachers offered chances for children to practise responsibility themselves by putting things back after use. They also made children aware of social responsibility such as being a group leader (e.g. Chantelle, field note, 29 February 2012). Phillipson and Lam (2011) point out the necessity for granting children opportunities in order to develop responsibility skills. Being a group leader could help children to recognize their roles and responsibilities in the classroom. To Kohn (1993), children should have opportunities to practise responsibility in order to master those skills. All teachers in this study created such opportunities for children. Miki explained and provided a rationale for the importance of helping children to use self-help skills:

> Self-help skills are important, especially now we have the 'Kong Kids' [the HK children who do not know how to take care of themselves in terms of self-help skills], because at home, we have servants [domestic helpers], grandfathers, grandmothers… all together we have 5-6 people to look after a child, and nowadays, children's self-help skills are not as good as in the old days; this is from my observations. (Miki, interview 2, 9 May 2012)

Miki's comment echoes in current concerns about the ability of HK children to take care of themselves. According to media reports, "76 percent of kids between four and twelve, cannot change their clothes themselves; 42 percent are unable to eat without supervision" and "61 percent are unable to bathe alone" (Parry, 2013, para. 6). The reasons that children fail to perform these basic self-help tasks is hypothesised to be that HK parents are more "focused on academics and encourage children to spend more time doing things like reading, maths and extra activities" and "they have a domestic helper who will do everything" (Parry, 2013, para. 10). These ideas are consistent with Miki's observations and may be part of the reason that the teachers focus so carefully on self-help skills.

Parents and teachers have important roles to play in developing children's self-discipline (Bear, 2005). Teachers and parents' attitudes and practices at home or in the classroom affect children's learning in terms of discipline. The interview data indicate that Miki, Lucy and Yuki were aware that parental attitudes might hinder children's learning of self-help skills. Miki stated that parents put more emphasis on children's academic achievement than on other aspects, such as self-discipline and self-help skills (Miki, interview 1, 17 April 2012). The other two teachers (Lucy and Yuki) complained that parents were not taking children's self-discipline seriously enough. Lucy and Yuki related the following tales:

> Parents expect you to do everything for their children. For example, they tell you about their children's feelings: today, he has mosquito bites, so if he scratches them, please put the medicine on him, and I could just tell the children that if they feel something, just let me know, as I don't know your feelings because your feelings are yours. I can't feel it… so, we need to teach them to grow. (Lucy, interview 2, 9 May 2012)
>
> On one occasion, a parent asked me to clean his daughter's bottom after toileting. I told him I would teach her how to do it. We need to teach children's self-help skills as children will need to move to primary school. They [children] have to learn how to look after themselves. They can't take the [kindergarten] teacher with them [to the primary school]. (Yuki, interview 2, 15 May 2012)

For these two teachers, children needed to be self-reliant in their self-help skills at kindergarten and in order to transition effectively to primary school. All teachers preferred children to practise self-help skills as far as possible. However, parents might prefer children to focus on academic areas (Chan, 2012; Parry, 2013, para. 10) rather than require teachers to help their children in every aspect including self-help skills such as toileting. Such parental expectation may reduce children's opportunities to practise self-help skills.

Self-help skills affect children's self-esteem, which is a key component of teaching (Gordon & Browne, 2014). It is generally accepted that through taking care of one's self, children know more about themselves: what they can do, and how to solve

problems and satisfy their own needs, all of which are associated with feelings of self-esteem (Gordon & Browne, 2014). Raver (2009) suggests that self-help skills promote children's autonomy and help children to survive and thrive in different situations and settings. Teachers in this study promoted children's autonomy by creating classroom environments which required children to use self-help skills as part of daily classroom life. For example, papers and different art materials were put in places where children could get them without the help of the teachers. Figure 7.2 shows children practicing their self-help skills (tidy up) after activities.

While some parents expected Lucy and Yuki to help their children with basic tasks, both teachers insisted that children should learn how to look after themselves by practising self-help skills. They refused to follow parents' requests but instead preferred to show their children how to accomplish tasks for themselves (for example, teaching a child how to clean her bottom after toileting and teach a child to make the teacher aware of itching). Garg (2005) argues that teachers have a variety of responsibilities in today's educational system. For example, they are responsible for preparing teaching materials, learning activities and learning environments, and at the same time developing children's academic skills. They need to deal with discipline matters such as children's inappropriate behaviour, and encourage children to use self-help skills when they enter classrooms so as to facilitate learning. In other words, parents

Figure 7.2. A group of children practiced their self-help skills (tidy up) after group/ project activities

might need to know teachers' responsibilities and boundaries in carrying out self-care tasks for children in kindergartens. When parents are aware of teachers' approaches to these tasks and their motivations for promoting self-help skills in their classrooms, they could do as Miki explained, encourage their children to use these skills at home. That way, parents and teachers might better cooperate to align children's learning at home and at school (Chan, 2012).

In sum, the teachers' concern about children's self-help skills was apparent in the interviews and observations. All teachers were concerned about children's self-help skills. They all stated that self-help skills were essential for children's futures and they gave different opportunities for the children to use them in their classrooms. They viewed self-help skills as important because of their perceived influence on children's transition to

school, namely autonomy development, sense of responsibility, and being a good citizen in the community in preparation for primary school life. Teachers wanted children to be independent in using self-help skills by the time they started primary school.

7.4 CLASSROOM RULES

This section examines the four teachers' views about and practices relating to classroom rules. The findings reveal that all the teachers were concerned about classroom rules and required children to observe the rules. To Manning and Bucher (2003), all classrooms need rules so that children can learn to be self-disciplined and demonstrate the preferred behaviour. That is, classroom discipline is vital for maintaining an environment which is secure and welcoming, and above all, enhances children's learning. The following sections discuss the circumstances of classroom rules in the four kindergarten classrooms.

7.4.1 The Most Emphasized Classroom Rules

Observational data showed that the most emphasized classroom rules were 'raising hands' and 'do as teachers say' for different occasions such as raising hands before speaking; listening to teachers and acting accordingly. Table 7.3 shows the rules in the four classrooms that were emphasized the most.

Table 7.3 The Most Emphasized Rules in the Four Classrooms

	Number of times observed			
	Thematic Approach		Project Approach	
Most emphasized classroom rule	Chantelle	Yuki	Lucy	Miki
Raising hand to answer questions Show interest in participation	75	76	34	73
Do as teachers say	57	56	38	55

Chantelle and Yuki, the two teachers who adopted thematic approaches used rules more than Lucy and Miki, who adopted a project approach. Although Yuki, Chantelle and Miki used different teaching approaches, they required children to follow classroom rules in terms of raising hands to answer questions or show interest in participation a comparable number of times during the observation period (76, 75, 73 times respectively). According to the observations, all children of the four classrooms were required to wait with their hands raised to answer a question or to show interest in participation in different activities. For example, Lucy asked her class in circle time: "who wants to work in the marble man group? Raise your hands if you want to join this group" (Observation, 15 March 2012). In Lucy's class, children were required to raise their hands 34 times. In the following observation, Chantelle demonstrated a specific hand-raising example:

> In circle time, Chantelle was showing a fish tank to her class and she asked the children what they could see in the tank. Many children became excited, saying the answer without raising their hands. Chantelle took away the fish tank and told the children, "too noisy, I can't hear a word... If you don't raise your hands, I

> won't listen to you". The children raised their hands immediately. (Chantelle, observation, 7 March 2012)

According to the observation data, this scene was a common occurrence in all classrooms. Teachers seemed to use this rule to maintain classroom control.

The next frequently used rule was 'do as the teacher says'. Children in this study were expected to do as teachers said. It was observed that all teachers made requests of children and asked them to follow a series of steps in sequence. For example, all teachers habitually made requests, which were spoken in a gentle way such as 'Get your worksheet/homework/picture [and] put them in your schoolbag'. Children were expected to follow the instructions and act accordingly. Chantelle was found to make the most frequent (57 times) number of requests among her counterparts. She made requests in a firm way in many cases. For instance, when her class had nearly finished their snacks, she said: "For those of you who have finished your snack, stand still [when lining up] for me; for those who haven't, be quick… [she counted] One Two Three! " (Observation, 2 March 2012). On another occasion, when a child was running to join her classmates to line up for toileting, Chantelle told her: "Go back to your seat and show me how you walk to the queue again" (Observation, 7 March 2012). This illustrates the consequence of not obeying the classroom rules or doing as the teacher says. Chantelle's action here reflects Skinner's (1953) theory (operant conditioning), which suggests that behaviour is controlled by environments and that the consequence of behaviour controls the future

incidence of that behaviour. In this case, Chantelle used punishment to correct children's improper behaviour by applying negative consequences. While Yuki (56 times) and Miki (55 times) made similar requests of the children, Lucy made the least requests (38 times). Yuki had clear and firm requirements of children's behaviour, for example, she told the children "Line up children, stand here (she pointed to the yellow line) before the yellow line" (Observation, 7 May 2012). Miki and Lucy asked children in a more gentle way. For instance, "Sit down here please" (Miki, observation, 3 May 2012), and "Children, let's go to the toilet first" (Lucy, observation, 1 March 2012). These examples indicate that the teachers expect children to obey the rules and do as they say.

These data suggest that all teachers were concerned about children's obedience in some ways and teachers' control in others. The notions of controlling (guan 管) are exercised by Chinese kindergarten teachers to accomplish parental expectations of learning attainment. As discussed in Chapter 2, 'Guan' (管) is "a Chinese term that combines the English-language meanings of educate, care for, support, control, and love" (Tobin et al., 2009, p. 42). That is, to 'guan' (管) is to guide children's behaviour according to Chinese cultural customs. Chantelle demonstrated one typical example: Chantelle and her class were in the corridor when they met another teacher. Chantelle addressed the class: "Say good morning to Ms. Y together" (Observation, 28 March 2012). This is a way to teach the children to respect other teachers and adults, as being a polite person is important in Chinese cultural customs. In fact, "Confucian values form

the core of the Chinese culture, penetrating all levels of social life, and also set the standards for family, community and political behaviour" (Yim, Lee, & Ebbeck, 2011, p. 287). Many kindergarten classrooms in HK are focused on conformity, discipline and behavioural control (Chan, 2012; Ng & Rao, 2008), all of which are evidenced in the four teachers' control of behaviour. Figure 7.3 shows that children were required to raise their hands before the teacher invited them to answer questions. Figure 7.4 demonstrates how children lined up after using the rest room.

Figure 7.3. Children raised hands to answer teachers' questions

Figure 7.4. Children lined up after using the rest room

Traditionally, children are required to respect teachers and always try to give positive responses such as doing as the teachers have said, and as part of this respect, they accept teachers' ideas and advice without question. However, cognitive constructivism suggests that teachers need to engage children in their own constructions rather than simply telling them what to do (Pound, 2011). Children need to be encouraged to re-examine content and problems from different perspectives. Teachers might generally guide, focus, facilitate and evaluate the process to support learning that is relevant to children's learning and development. Although direct instruction might be needed occasionally, teachers have to decide the limits to directing instruction and provide opportunities for children to be autonomous (Lee, Yin, & Zhang, 2009; Marlowe & Page, 1998).

In view of this, all teachers were concerned about rules and required children to obey classroom rules. Two main points, which were most emphasized in this study are that children were requested to: i) raise hands to answer a question or show interest in participation in activities; and ii) do as the teacher said. That is, children had to listen to the teachers and act accordingly. The next section reveals other classroom rules that were identified from the observational data.

7.4.2 Other Classroom Rules

There were other rules operating in the four classrooms apart from the two most emphasized rules. The other rules in the four classrooms are shown in Table 7.4.

Lining up is another rule which serves the same purpose as raising hands and doing as the teacher said; that is, to maintain classroom order. In most cases, children in all classrooms needed to wait (line up) for their turn when classmates were engaged in desired activities, or line up to switch to different activities. For example, at toilet time, children needed to line up in the middle of the classroom together before going to the toilet and they had to

Table 7.4 Other Classroom Rules in the Four Classrooms (Compiled from Observations and Field Notes)

Classroom Routine/ rules	Lining up for different activities and transitions	Pay attention when doing activities	Speak quietly in the classroom	Pay attention when people are speaking	Rest heads on table while waiting	No running in the classroom
Thematic approach						
Chantelle	45	22	12	8	9	7
Yuki	26	11	10	8	0	3
Project approach						
Lucy	11	0	7	5	0	0
Miki	18	11	17	14	0	0

line up again and wait for everyone to finish before returning to the classroom together. Children were engaged in some sorts of activities such as singing songs or counting numbers when waiting. This occurred 45 times in Chantelle's class; 26 times in Yuki's class; 11 times in Lucy's class and 18 times in Miki's class. The following field note shows how Yuki's class lined up in the physical activity:

> Yuki was in the outside area with her class. The children were divided into two groups: one was playing on the slide and the other was playing with a toy car.

> Children in both groups needed to line up [one by one] for their turn and they were waiting patiently. Yuki was walking around, giving instructions [be careful; don't run] and reminded the children to line up occasionally. Nobody tried to jump the queue. (Yuki, field note, 7 May 2012)

Yuki's reminders from time to time about the rules such as lining up, may be due to her prioritising of safety issues and the sequencing of the activities. For example, a group of children rushing to ride a bicycle at the same time could be dangerous. As kindergarten teachers work with children who are three to five years old, they may need to ensure the safety of the children by reminding them about safety rules in the playground and classroom. In fact, HK teachers are concerned about classroom rules, and they are expected to maintain classroom discipline and uphold appropriate behaviour (Opper, 1992; Rao et al., 2010).

According to the observation and field note data from the four classrooms, it was common to observe teachers choosing the 'good' (well behaved) children to express their views or answer questions and make the 'not very good' children wait for their turn. Lucy demonstrated how this happened in circle time: "Wai Wai, if you sit well then I will invite you [to speak] next time", and she then reinforced good behaviours by inviting a girl who was sitting nicely and had her hand raised (Observation, 15 March 2012). Fields et al. (2010) assert that "waiting for a turn is incredibly hard on young children as they don't have a sense of time" (p. 123). The issue of allowing children the freedom to speak

and at the same time keep a whole class under control needs "a well-defined set of classroom routines" (Luk, 2005, p. 203). The reasons the teachers put emphasis on these classroom rules may be linked to the philosophies of Confucius (Hue, 2007; Phillipson & Lam, 2011).

The impact of Confucianism can be seen in the four classrooms although Western influences have had a major influence on HK society (Hue, 2007) and on kindergarten teachers in general. Because of the influence of Confucian ideas in education, children are expected to follow traditional Chinese norms such as paying respect to teachers and putting collective harmony and needs above their own personal needs (Li, 2012; Phillipson & Lam, 2011). The observations in the four classrooms reflected these traditional Chinese norms in practice. The following excerpt from Miki's class is an example:

> In project time, the children were about to do an experiment, which would show how the children used different methods to move a paper car forward on a table. Miki asked the group to sit near the table. Two boys wanted the same seat. They wouldn't give up and argued over it for a while… Miki looked at them and told them that the group and the experiment couldn't start because of their behaviour. The two boys looked at Miki, then both of them moved to other [two] chairs [with angry faces]. (Miki, observation, 30 April 2012)

It seems that children get used to following what teachers say or want them to do and act based on that instruction. Although the two boys were not willing to give up the seat, they might do it for the sake of Miki and their classmates, so that the experiment could start. Jones and Jones (2013) argue that "teachers' approaches to classroom management [rules] are clearly impacted by their own life experiences" (p. 23). In Western contexts, the same situation could probably be handled differently, the boys may have been directed to other seats by the teacher; the teacher could have used it as a group problem solving situation, and/or the boys could have been reprimanded for arguing. Teachers' cultural perceptions of traditional Chinese norms may therefore contribute to how they view and sustain classroom rules.

Another related reason may be the intention of a smooth transition to primary school as mentioned earlier in relation to the emphasis on self-help skills (Chan, 2012; Li, 2004; Wong, 2003). Li (2004) and Pearson (2011) state that one of the basic and important responsibilities of kindergarten teachers is to prepare kindergarten children in HK for primary schooling. One of the preparations for primary schooling may be rule obeying (Chan, 2012). Yuki's class revealed this issue:

> The children had a special arrangement for practising the primary-one activities [primary school students in HK have recesses between lessons but kindergarten students do not have such an arrangement]. They have recess between lessons. Children play outside the classroom for 10 minutes. Yuki rings a bell after the 10

> minute recess. They need to go back to the classroom immediately [as if they were in primary school]. While many children run quickly back to the classroom when they hear the bell, some children walked back slowly. Yuki asked those who walked slowly to walk faster and reminded them that the bell had rung. (Yuki, field note, 15 May 2012)

This instance might illustrate that Yuki is aware of the rules in primary school and eager to get children to practise these rules in advance. It is also another example of Yuki requiring children to do as the teacher has requested. The next frequently stressed rules were "Pay attention when doing activities" and "Speak quietly in the classroom". In terms of 'Pay attention when people are speaking'' Miki made most frequent requests (14 times) among the three teachers, followed by Chantelle and Yuki (8 times each) and Lucy (5 times). All teachers attempted to help children with this skill by requiring them to attend to the person speaking to them. Chantelle demonstrated how she did it: ''K3 A, put your hands on your lap and we will have circle time'', and let me see if everyone is looking at me and is listening to me [when I am speaking]'' (Observation, 23 March 2012). Yuki provided another example when talking to an individual child: "You don't know the name of these clothes because you are talking and not listening… I normally invite those who are attentive during lessons and always raise their hands [to answer questions]." Bear (2005) mentions that when children become aware of and listen to each other, they are developing social responsibility. The above examples indicate that all teachers helped children to develop the concept of social responsibility.

The three teachers, Chantelle (12 times), Yuki (10 times) and Miki (17 times) expected children to speak in a low voice or stop talking when they were doing activities. Whenever children were being noisy, the three teachers requested them to lower their voices or stop talking. Yuki's (thematic approach) responses were typical: "Shhh… my ear is hurting" (Yuki, observation, 7 May 2012), "Keep your mouth shut" (Yuki, observation, 15 May 2012). As a result, children might think that talking and sharing is harmful to their work progression. Vygotsky (1978) reminds us of the advantages of encouraging conversations among children in classrooms and the learning that can occur with more knowledgeable others being able to help children enhance their understandings. He implies that language and thinking development are closely related and that teachers need to encourage regular dialogues in classrooms. Interactive conversations, which are discussed in more detail in the next chapter, enhance children's communication skills, build confidence, and above all, improve children's critical thinking skills (Rose & Rogers, 2012).

Lucy was an exception in that she seemed quite relaxed about children talking, as the following field note shows:

> Children in her [Lucy] class were allowed to talk freely. When Lucy's class was playing the marble game, the children were quite excited; they spoke loudly and played happily. The classroom was a bit noisy, but the teacher [Lucy] tolerated the situation [noisiness]. (Lucy, field note, 15 March 2012)

It seemed that Lucy valued children's involvement in the project activities; she might think that it was a good sign as children were exchanging views and ideas through talking. Moreover, Lucy (project approach) not only seemed less strict regarding the "speak[ing] quietly in the classroom" (7 times) rule, but she also had no requirement for the children to "pay attention when doing activities" (0 time) rule. This might be due to children being very involved in doing their work and there being no chance for Lucy to require them to do so:

> It was in project time and the children were doing their project work in groups. Lucy was walking around and looking at their progress. They were very immersed in the activities which had been chosen by themselves. (Lucy, field note, 1 March 2012)

Chantelle (thematic approach) appeared more serious about children 'Resting their heads on the table while waiting'. She was the only one who required children to follow this rule. A field note reveals further details:

> When children finished revising their homework, they rested their
> heads on the table and the teacher started calling the children's names
> and they could go to choose whatever activities they liked [free play time].
> (Chantelle, field note, 2 March 2012)

This instance reflects the values of traditional culture regarding control. Control is viewed by teachers as useful in supporting children's learning. Chantelle gave an explanation as follows:

> A long time ago, I requested them [the children] to rest their heads on the table whenever they had finished something in different sections as their discipline was not very good. And now they are [disciplined] better, they only need to do this [resting head on the table] when they have finished revising their homework. (Chantelle, interview 2, 28 March 2012)

Children in Chantelle and Yuki's classroom had to practise the "No Running in the classroom" rule. The two teachers may consider children of this age (five years) are prone to accidents and need to learn safety issues in order to protect themselves. Yuki demonstrated how to remind children about this in the outdoor area: "No running, remember [the rule]?… ok, the boys can come to me and walk slowly" (Observation, 25 April 2012). According to the data, all teachers helped the children to follow the rules. They reminded them of the rules verbally many times. Teachers expressed their views on the purposes of obeying rules, including assisting children's transition to primary school and being a good citizen in the future.

> Classroom discipline is very important as children need to go to primary school and they need to know how to behave in the classroom. (Yuki, interview 1, 20 April 2012)
>
> Children need to be obey the classroom rules, as they will study in primary school and have lots of rules to follow there. (Lucy, interview 1, 1 March 2012)
>
> It is important because children will grow up and eventually face

> society. (Chantelle, interview 1, 21 February 2012)
>
> Children need to learn to be good citizens in the future. (Miki, interview 1, 17 April 2012)

All teachers stated that obeying classroom rules was very important as it can affect children's transition to primary school and eventually into society. All teachers also mentioned that children need to learn and get used to the classroom rules as they assume that children have to pursue even more rules when they progress to primary school and society. In fact, in her study of children's difficulties in transition to school in HK, Wong (2003) found that rules and regulations are the most demanding of all matters. In a more recent study, Chan (2012) revealed explicit details:

> In terms of discipline, many [primary one students] were unable to queue quietly, listen to the teacher during assembly, or sit still and keep quiet in class. They appeared to have not yet become accustomed to the more formal practices of the primary school classroom. (p. 656)

In other words, kindergarten children may not be able to meet primary school teachers' expectations in terms of discipline, although Chan (2012) comments that "whether such standards [expectations] are developmentally appropriate for young children or constitute classroom control measures remains open to debate" (p. 658).

Accordingly, all teachers were concerned about classroom rules. They put every effort into helping children to follow rules. They expected children to obey rules for the

purpose of transition to primary school and being good citizens in the future. However, the effectiveness of classroom rules depends on the strategies through which rules are established and implemented. The next section discusses the discipline strategies which were used by the teachers in this study.

7.5 DISCIPLINE STRATEGIES

This section explores the discipline strategies that were used to sustain control in the classrooms and support the teachers in maintaining social order and expectations.

As indicated in the interview and observation data, all teachers had suggested and demonstrated some kind of discipline strategies to handle children's undesirable behaviour. Through responding to an open-ended question, it was clear that teachers used different methods and strategies to deal with children's inappropriate behaviour. Table 7.5 shows the four teachers' discipline strategies mentioned in the two interviews.

The interview data revealed that both thematic and project teachers established classroom rules at the beginning of the school year. All teachers clarified their objectives in the first week of the commencement of the school year. Lucy stated her procedure clearly in the interview:

> Setting up the classroom rules at the beginning of the school year is important for the children. If children know them right from the beginning [of the school year],

they will remember [the rules] and get used to them [the rules]. It is easier to adopt [the rules] as well. (Lucy, interview 1, 29 February 2012)

Table 7.5 Discipline Strategies Mentioned in the Two Interviews (Verbal Reports)

	Thematic approach		Project approach	
Discipline strategies used	Chantelle	Yuki	Lucy	Miki
Set rules at the beginning of the school year	✓	✓	✓	✓
Establish classroom rules with children	✓	×	✓	✓
Display rules on wall to remind children	✓	✓	✓	✓
Clap Hands	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ring bell	✓	✓	✓	×
Talk to the children	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eye contact	✓	✓	×	×
Sit beside the children	×	✓	×	×
Praise the opposite	×	✓	✓	✓
Stop the activity	✓	✓	✓	×

Lucy's views were similar to the other teachers. The idea was that setting rules early might influence the rest of the school year (Bear, 2010). Children might be more responsive about the rules in this case, as they know how to act in terms of appropriate behaviour in the classroom. The data support the idea that teachers recognize the consequence and benefits of setting classroom rules at the beginning of the school year.

This action also reflects a well-known Chinese saying, 'A good start is half way to success' (好的開始是成功的一半).

Regarding the methods of setting up the classroom rules, three of the teachers (Lucy, Miki and Chantelle) reported that they established classroom rules with the children. However, Yuki (thematic) insisted that she would be the main person to set up the rules, declaring: "I have been teaching in the school for many years, so I have my way of setting rules such as how to queue up and stand up" (Yuki, interview 1, 20 April 2012). Yuki also "told the children why I set those rules so that they understand my intention" (Yuki, interview 1, 20 April 2012). Wong and Wong (2004) suggest that teachers may think they have an obligation to set the classroom rules as children are too young to make these decisions. Teachers might also desire to have control over their classes such as knowing children's situations and progress. Furthermore, teachers may see themselves as authority figures according to Confucius' view. On the contrary, Miki (project) preferred to set the rules with children as "they will have better memories [about the set rules] by doing so" (Miki, interview 1, 7 April 2012). However, Hatch (2005) and Kohn (1993) state that when young children have contributed to rule making, they understand the rules better and follow them more. Furthermore, from a cognitive constructivist point of view, through setting their own classroom rules, which are closely related to their everyday life, children can make sense of their world and construct their own understanding (Rose & Rogers, 2012).

All the teachers displayed rules on the wall to remind children about the rules and the expectation follow them. However, teachers were different in terms of the degree to which they involved children in creating the rules. Chantelle and Yuki (thematic approach) had the rules printed by computer while Lucy and Miki had the rules hand-written by the children themselves. Displaying rules on the wall involved use of different corners in the classrooms. For example, stating the number of children allowed in a particular learning corner helps children to remember and follow the rules as they can see the rules clearly, especially if they were involved in creating them.

One of the aims of classroom rules includes developing positive interactions (Essa, 2014). In the interviews, all teachers reported that they would use cues and reminders such as clapping hands, ringing a bell, talking to the children, eye contact, sitting beside the children and praising the opposite to attract children's attention in an effect to maintain classroom discipline. According to social learning theory, individuals wait for cues from outside and decide how and when to respond (Taylor, 2002). In order to maintain control, different cues need to be sent and responses rewarded. Importantly, the "presence or absence of cues, number of cues, and types of cues can determine the resulting amount and type of learning that occurs" (Taylor, 2002 p. 58). Yuki (thematic approach) demonstrated cues and reminders as follows:

> Children were pretending they were spacemen [SIC] and walked slowly in the sky. They had to get through a 'tunnel' and avoid stepping on some 'odd circles'.

> Some children had stepped on the ‘odd circles’, so Yuki first clapped her hands gently and then reminded them verbally not to step on them [odd circles]. (Yuki, field note, 10 May 2012)

From a slightly different theoretical perspective, behaviourists suggest that learning can be attained by extrinsic motivation (Crain, 2011). They suggest that positive reinforcement such as praise is likely to produce positive responses whereas negative reinforcement reduces positive responses (Skinner, 1963). As observed, Yuki used positive interactions as teaching strategies to shape children’s appropriate behaviour when playing games or other activities. However, when Yuki’s class was not playing according to the set rules, Yuki would not tolerate this behaviour although she expressed it in a gentle way. She watched the groups closely and made sure that they were behaving by giving reminders and hints. Miki demonstrated positive interaction in how she talked to a child: “If you haven’t written the result, you may write it now” (Observation, 17 April 2012). An example from the field notes showed Chantelle’s positive strategy:

> In group activity time, Chantelle sat next to a boy [intentionally] as he kept talking to others, and didn’t concentrate on his work (art activity). She [Chantelle] looked at him [made eye contact with him, without saying anything]. The boy continued with his work again. (Chantelle, field note, 21 February 2012)

Generally speaking, children were obedient and followed the classroom rules. All teachers were inclined to use positive strategies through hints and reminders to

encourage children to demonstrate and maintain good behaviour. According to Essa (2014), positive classroom strategies presume an atmosphere where learners are motivated. Lewis and Roache (2011) point out that hinting helps children to gain "a sense of responsibility for engaging in work and communicating respectfully" as it places children "on a more equal footing with their teacher, thus building their sense of control and self-esteem" (p. 243). Opper (1996) mentioned that such positive discipline strategies could help children to identify other appropriate behaviour.

In terms of negative discipline strategies, Lucy (project), Yuki and Chantelle (thematic approach) added a negative element such as stopping the activity when the children did not follow the rules. The following excerpt from a field note shows how this occurred:

> A group of 10 children were playing games in the outdoor area. Some children did not follow the rules of the game such as touching something they should not touch. Yuki told the group: "Stop! Come here [pointed to the floor] and sit down. I saw some children did not follow the rules. If you do it again, we won't play anymore, you will have to go back to the classroom, understand?" (Yuki, field note, 10 May 2012)

Yuki's warning was effective, as the children followed the rules of the game afterwards. Although Lucy mentioned that she would stop the activity if the children did not obey the rule, she did not put it into practice in her classroom. Observations showed that the

children in Lucy's class were absorbed in doing their project work. They might not have the time or interest to break the rules and thus Lucy did not need to stop any activity because of any discipline problems.

The observations revealed that children were obedient in all classrooms. Verbal warnings alone were sufficient to maintain classroom discipline. Teachers did not need to take further action such as timeout or other punishments to deal with misbehaviour. According to Skinner (1963), pleasant experiences, such as praise, are positive reinforcers, while unpleasant experiences, such as punishment, are negative reinforcers. When both types of reinforcement constantly occur, positive reinforcement increases the occurrences of behaviours. From another perspective, it may be possible to understand this phenomenon as related to Chinese cultural influences, in which children get used to obeying, and whereby "teachers bear the responsibility of teaching students self-restraint and correct behaviour" (Li, 2004, p. 335). Lucy (project approach) summed up most of these strategies used by the four teachers when coping with children's inappropriate behaviour with a comment in the last interview:

> To attract children's attention I first look at them, but if they don't notice, I will use a bell to alert them, for example when they speak too loud; if it does not work, I would ask them to lower their voices or I would stop whatever activities as a consequence. (Lucy, interview 1, 1 March 2012)

Apart from reporting verbally in the interviews how they used discipline strategies in the classrooms, observations showed that the teachers also demonstrated how they enacted the discipline strategies in the classrooms. In general, teachers mentioned more discipline strategies in the interviews than were observed in the classrooms. They had different plans to handle children's behaviour. Table 7.6 shows the number of times the main discipline strategies were used by the four teachers in the classrooms, as recorded in the classroom observations. Two of the four teachers, Yuki (thematic approach) and Miki (project approach), had high expectations about children's behaviour. Observations showed that Yuki (60 times) and Miki (66 times) used the strategy of providing clear

Table 7.6 Main Discipline Strategies from Classroom Observations

	Thematic approach		Project approach	
Discipline strategies	Chantelle	Yuki	Lucy	Miki
Clear expectations were given before children started the activities (e.g., "share your pencil with your classmates.")	18	60	10	66
Teacher 'praised the opposite' of children' s challenging behaviour)	0	0	8	6
External cues(e.g., rings bell to alert children)	6	12	10	4
Competition, comparison and criticism (e.g., "let's see who can find out the answer quickly.")	18	3*	4	23**

* e.g., "Tak, you speak too loud, my ears are hurting."
** e.g., "let me see which group can work quietly."

instructions before children started the activities. They were enthusiastic in providing children with guidance to ensure appropriate behaviour. The following is an example from a circle time situation in Miki's classroom:

> [A child was doing other things at his desk while Miki and the project group were sitting in the circle area. They were waiting for him to start the project activity]. Miki told him: "We count from 1 to 10, you need to be here".
>
> When the group members started to count, the boy went to the area where they were sitting, quickly. (Observation, 27 April 2012)

Another example from Yuki reminded the class about the rules of game they were about to play: "Remember two words, be quiet [when you are playing this game]" (Yuki, observation, 4 May 2012). Children repeated the words (Be quiet) obediently before they started the activity. As mentioned before, Yuki did not involve children in making the classroom rules. This act might help those children who easily forget rules to remember and conquer behavioural problems (Opper, 1996). Chantelle (thematic approach) and Lucy (project approach) seemed more relaxed on this issue, giving children clear expectations of how to behave 18 times and 10 times respectively. Pearson (2011) stresses that "teachers promote a sense of belonging by ensuring that all children understand and are comfortable with a clearly articulated set of expectations for learning and behaviour" (p. 218). On the one hand, this 'clear expectation' strategy reminds children to behave appropriately in the kindergartens. On the other hand, children might

rely too much on teachers or adults telling them what to do next, which might hinder the development of children's self-discipline and independent thinking.

In the area of praising the opposite of children's challenging behaviour, Lucy praised the well-behaved children instead of scolding those misbehaving (Field note, 1 March 2012). The following observation reveals the details:

> Lucy and her class were in circle time: two boys [sitting together] did not pay attention to their peer, who was introducing his marble man to the whole class. Lucy praised a girl verbally in front of the two boys: "Ting Ting [the attentive child's name], you are very good, you are showing respect to your classmate. I will invite you to introduce your work afterwards". (Lucy, observation, 1 March 2012)

Lucy and Miki (project approach) used the praise the opposite strategy eight and six times respectively while Yuki and Chantelle (thematic approach) did not use it. It seemed that this strategy was effective, as children were normally better behaved after teachers used it. Both of the thematic teachers (Yuki and Chantelle) preferred using other strategies, which were more straightforward. In one example, Chantelle said to the children "Quickly put your cups back into your schoolbag, as we are going out [of the classroom] now" (Observation, 2 March 2014). The observations showed that all teachers used "external cues" as part of their discipline strategies. Yuki (thematic approach) used this strategy the most (12 times) while Miki (project approach), used it the least (four times). Two examples follow: "In free play time, Yuki rings a bell and the children start

to tidy up soon after" (Field note, 25 April 2012); "Miki clapped her hands to attract the children's attention during activities" (Field note, 17 April 2012). All teachers used different types of positive discipline strategies to maintain classroom discipline.

Although all teachers tended to use positive strategies of telling children clearly about the rules before commencing the activities to make sure they were aware of the required classroom discipline/rules, observations showed that Chantelle (thematic approach) and Miki (project approach) (Table 5.2) used more negative methods such as "competition, comparison and criticism" than Lucy (project approach) and Yuki (thematic approach). The following example is from Chantelle's class when the children were practising a graduation song. When lining up in the classroom (children were required to stand still and line up side by side with their hands behind them), Chantelle said:

> You have been in this kindergarten for three years. You are K3 now, so are big boys and girls. You should know how to stand and sit. You shouldn't move your body when you are singing the graduation song. This song represents your class, you have to respect it when you are singing it as you need to perform it to your parents and many people when you come to your graduation ceremony. (Chantelle, observation, 23 March 2012)

The graduation ceremony is a big event for the teachers and K3 children. All K3 children have to take part in some kind of performance such as singing the graduation song

together in the ceremony. Teachers and children have to rehearse for a few months before the ceremony, which is normally held in June or July each year, so as to make a 'perfect' ceremony for the children and parents. As Pearson (2011) commented, there is enormous pressure on teachers: "the time spent in planning and rehearsal exerts considerable pressure on teachers who are already grappling with an overflowing curriculum" (p. 218). The above observation shows that Chantelle was seriously concerned about the performance of her class as it could be a perfect opportunity to "please parents" and help children to gain "a positive sense of self" in the graduation ceremony (Pearson, 2011, p. 218) Chantelle saw the rehearsal as an important part of this process.

The impression of children's misbehaviour, which leads to teachers' criticisms, is often blamed for children's naughtiness and faults. However, children's misbehaviour may not be their own fault (Tam, 2009); it could be the teachers' responsibility. The following excerpt demonstrates how this might happen:

> Miki asked a group of 10 children to come forward for her demonstration of an air experiment with a small water tank. The children rushed and moved near the water tank at the same time. Everyone squeezed together and tried to get a good position to watch the experiment. They started to argue and push each other when they couldn't see the experiment clearly. Miki told the group: "I do not appreciate what you have just done, you don't know how to follow the classroom rules". (Miki, field note, 17 April 2012)

In this case, Miki criticized the children's misbehaviour and that they did not obey the classroom rules. Miki gave clear expectations before children started activities more than the other teachers (66 times). It could be that the lack of instruction on this occasion was reflected in children rushing, having not been reminded of the expected behaviour. Luk (2005) argues that teachers' unclear instructions might lead to confusion and noisiness and thus lead to misbehaviour in the classroom.

The teachers mentioned more discipline strategies in the interviews than were observed in the classrooms (See Tables 5.5 and 5.6), which might be due to time constraints and the traditional roles of teachers. Teachers in general have to deal with a tight schedule in most HK kindergartens and thus teachers have to be "conscious of time control and delivery of outcomes during class teaching" (Li, 2006, p. 40). As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, timing is a major concern for teachers. In most cases, they tend to use the most convenient strategies to deal quickly with children's inappropriate behaviour. That is, they tell them what to do directly. Teachers rely on children's cooperation (Li, 2006) – telling children exactly what to do before activities might help to prevent inappropriate behaviour and at the same time, maintain classroom discipline. In addition, teachers are known as authority figures in HK, so teachers get used to telling children what to do (Li, 2006) rather than asking children what they want to do. Li (2007) asserts that "HK kindergarten teachers tend to be rather directive and give a lot of verbal instructions" (p. 302).

7.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

To sum up this chapter, the interview and observation data revealed that all the teachers were concerned about classroom discipline and rules. Teachers not only had discipline strategies in mind but also demonstrated them in the classrooms. During activities, most teachers frequently used encouragement and clear expectations before commencing activities to keep children on task and suggest appropriate behaviour. Teachers verbalized the classroom rules before doing different activities so that children knew what to do next (Fields et al., 2010). All teachers had different strategies for classroom discipline. Lucy and Miki (project approach) used different strategies to re-direct children's attention positively rather than requesting them to obey rules directly. Chantelle and Yuki (thematic approach) named more strategies in the interviews than Lucy and Miki (project approach) (Table 5.2). It seems that some teachers may be more inclined to a traditional Chinese vision which considers that praise could harm children by spoiling them and that Chinese students are more likely to tolerate high levels of teacher control and strict discipline. It seems that some theories and pedagogical practices such as a child-centred approach which are valued and work well in Western countries may not be fully acceptable in the context of HK. In short, there are few differences discipline-wise between the teachers from project and thematic classrooms. This suggests that underlying expectations and cultural practices might over-ride the philosophy of the

thematic and project approaches. It also means that an Eastern interpretation of these approaches may account for the cultural context.

Chapter 8: Conclusions and Recommendations

8.0 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter provides a summary of the study along with conclusions and recommendations. I begin the chapter with a brief review of the study encapsulating the research purpose, research aims and questions, literature review, methodology, theoretical framework and research findings. Following this revision, I focus on the three key findings. I then offer recommendations related to play, critical and creative thinking, problem-solving skills and future research. Figure 8.1 shows the study's overall key findings and related discussion points, and provides links through to the study's conclusions and recommendations.

8.1 STUDY OVERVIEW

This collective case study investigated four kindergarten teachers' perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices in Early Childhood Education (ECE) in HK. The primary purpose was to examine the practitioners' perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices in Hong Kong (HK) kindergartens. The literature review provided

an understanding of how historical and contemporary teaching approaches, traditional Chinese values evident in Confucian heritage culture, (such as obedience) and other factors (such as parental expectations) influence ECE in HK. The four teachers' perspectives and practices were investigated through the lenses of behaviourism, social learning theory, cognitive constructivism and social constructivism.

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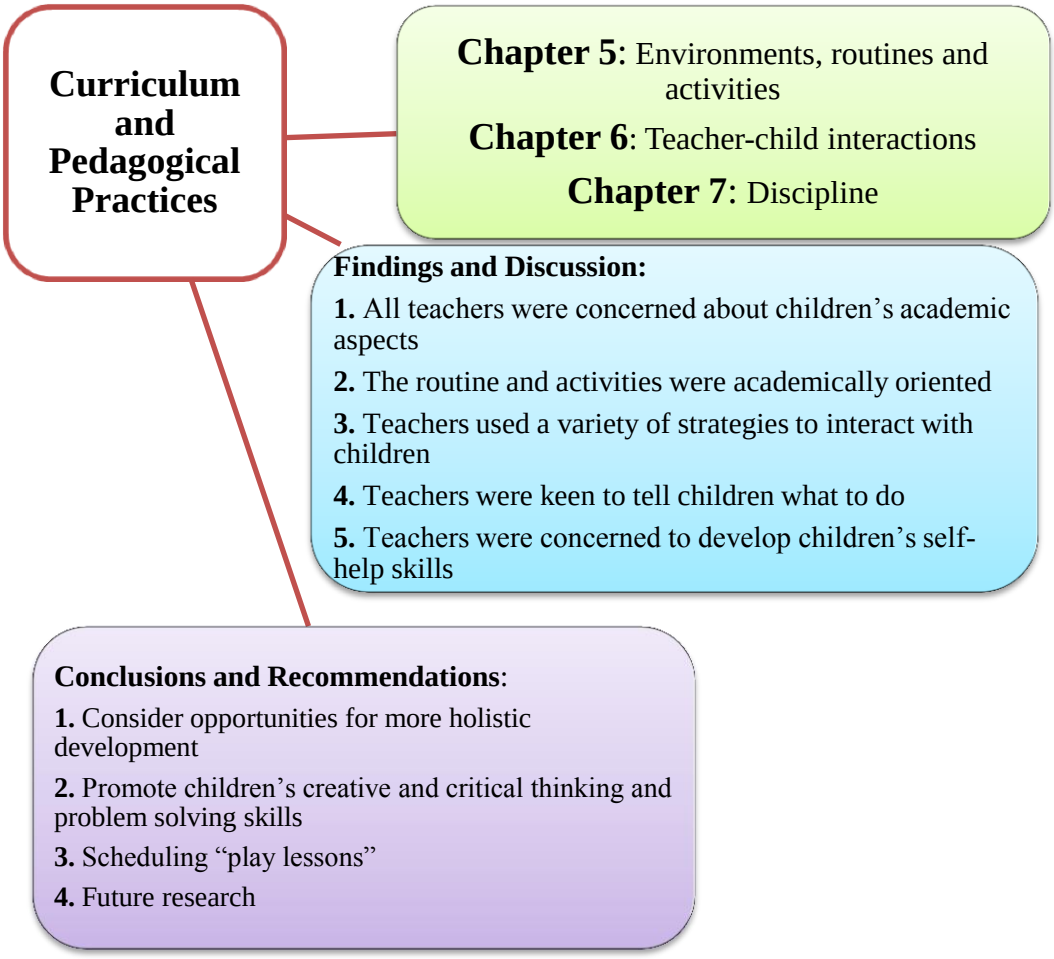

Figure 8.1. The overall findings and discussion, and the conclusions and recommendations of this study

This study aimed to examine the contemporary context with regard to four kindergarten teachers' perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices in HK kindergarten classrooms. Specifically, this study aimed to:

i) investigate teachers' perspectives on thematic and project approaches;

ii) explore current curriculum and pedagogical practices used in implementing thematic and project approaches;

iii) examine similarities and differences in teachers' teaching perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices when using thematic and project approaches;

iv) identify the factors shaping teachers' perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices; and

v) offer explanations about how curriculum innovations are adopted and implemented in HK.

The research questions for this study included:

i) What are teachers' perspectives about thematic and project approaches in four kindergartens rated as "good" by the HK Education Bureau (EDB) (two using a thematic approach and two using a project approach)?

ii) What curriculum and pedagogical practices do teachers use in the two

kindergartens adopting a thematic approach and the two kindergartens using a project approach in kindergartens rated as ‘good’ by the EDB?

iii) What are the similarities and differences in teachers’ perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices when using thematic and project approaches in the four kindergartens rated as ‘good’ by the EDB?

iv) What factors guide teachers’ curriculum and pedagogical practices in the two kindergartens adopting a thematic approach and the two using a project approach, all of which have been rated by the EDB as ‘good’?

Semi-structured interviews, observations and field notes were used to collect data. Four kindergarten teachers, two of whom used a thematic approach and two who used a project approach, were purposefully selected as participants. They worked in kindergartens rated as “good” by the HK EDB.

To answer the research questions, the findings pointed out that teachers were very concerned about children’s learning in terms of environment, routine and activities, teacher-child interactions, classroom discipline and rules. Children were expected to listen to what the teachers had to say and acted accordingly. The findings revealed that children had to follow the classroom routine, which was set by the teacher and academically oriented. Children had little or no time to enjoy free-play time although it was timetabled in the daily routine. Little play time implies that children have less opportunity to learn and practice other important life skills such as creative and critical

thinking, and problem solving. If enhancing children's holistic development is one of the goals of ECE, then ways have to be found to support children in these areas.

8.2 CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS, ROUTINES AND ACTIVITIES

Although the classroom activities included academic and non-academic aspects, teachers were highly concerned about academic aspects such as homework and worksheets. In a typical school day, children needed to do homework, which normally included Chinese, English and maths, within an assigned time. Children had to finish their homework before they could play in their favourite learning corners. As described in Chapter 6, children are required to do homework at school so that teacher can make sure they know how to do the required homework of the day. After completing homework, children could choose various materials in the learning corners, which were related to the themes of the week and were created to help children extend their knowledge through self-selected activities. However, this requirement to finish homework before play meant that not all children had opportunities to choose self-selected activities, as some could not finish their homework on time. Observational data showed that most learning corners involved quiet activities such as reading books and drawing pictures. There was not a balance between quiet and active activities; rather, there were more quiet (book corner, maths corner, English corner, creative corner and art corner) than active corners (doll corner and music corner) for children to explore.

8.3 TEACHER-CHILD INTERACTIONS

In terms of classroom interaction, all teachers initiated teacher-child interactions and children were seldom the first to communicate. In addition, all teachers tended to tell children what to do. Such teacher-child interaction is a feature of a teacher-centred approach, which has long been a controversial issue in ECE (Li et al. 2012). Teachers invested enormous effort into developing children's academic skills such as taking every opportunity, including physical activity time to practice children's maths concept. It is highly likely that teachers' perspectives on curriculum and pedagogical practices were influenced by cultural factors, which can strongly affect teachers' behaviour and instructional methods (Chan & Chong, 2012; Hue, 2007).

8.4 DISCIPLINE: CHILDREN'S SELF-HELP SKILLS, CLASSROOM RULES AND DISCIPLINE STRATEGIES

Although kindergarten teachers may have different views about how to use discipline, the teachers who participated in this study focused on two main aspects of discipline: children's self-help skills (such as getting their snacks independently) and classroom rules. Children were expected to learn and practice self-help skills as a preparation for their future lives, with an immediate focus on primary school in particular. There were few differences among the four teachers in classroom practices concerning self-help skills regardless of whether they followed thematic or project approaches. All

teachers mentioned that self-help skills were vital for children's development and future lives, and they provided various opportunities for the children to practice such skills in the classroom. The teachers used different strategies, such as clapping hands, to maintain classroom discipline. All teachers frequently demonstrated and told children what to do so as to maintain classroom discipline and rules. As discussed in Chapter 7, the reasons for teachers' concerns about classroom discipline and rules might be due to the time constraints and current adaptions of traditional roles of teachers. That is, Kindergarten teachers are expected to shape children's behaviour by strictly controlling it in order to prepare children for primary school (Chan, 2012; Wong, 2003). Interview data showed that teaching strategies regarding discipline were closely related to helping children achieve a smooth transition to primary school, which appeared to be one of the teachers' main aims.

8.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations section starts with the overall findings of this study. It then moves to specific recommendations for play, creativity, classroom environment, critical thinking, problem solving, scheduling of play lessons and, finally, future research.

Current policy agendas still understand play as a medium for learning (Wood, 2009). According to the HK curriculum policy document known as the *Guide* (CDC, 2006), play is considered to be the best activity for promoting children's mental development, and

through play children can develop creative and thinking skills. In HK, Cheng (2001) and Wu (2014) support such approaches in suggesting that play supports children's social, cognitive, and language development and creativity.

However, the findings of this study revealed that children had little time for play: they needed to finish academic work before they played. Such routines and priorities reflect that teachers did not see play as important, although they agreed, in principle, that a child-centred classroom offers benefits for children. In fact, some studies in HK (such as Cheng, 2001; Li, 2004 and Wong, Wang, & Cheng, 2011; Wu, 2014) point out that the value of play has been compromised by different factors such as parental expectations regarding children's academic learning. Wu (2014) observed that "freedom of play in HK kindergarten was very limited, and conformity and unity were required" (2009, p. 238). In a pilot study, Wu (2009) stated that children in the upper kindergarten (K3) class did not have space in the curriculum for dramatic play behaviour. Wu suggested that "more effort is needed to promote children's play through settings with fewer or even no play objects to generate abstract thinking" (2009, p. 240). In this study, however, it is not clear that why there was no dramatic area (doll corner) in the kindergarten. That is, whether the kindergarten had no time or space to create such a corner or the teacher did not value the functions of a doll corner. According to Myck-Wayne (2010), when children participate in dramatic play, they have the opportunities to use a prop (such as a block) as a symbol for something else and thereby engage in higher-level thinking. In dramatic play, children

can express themselves free of adult direction and comment (Myck-Wayne, 2010). Through the process of following social rules when involved in dramatic play, children can develop cognitive functions such as self-regulation and self-restraint (Vygotsky, 1978). Dramatic play also supports children's literacy, social and problem-solving skills as the children have opportunities to use words to collaborate and communicate with their peers (Myck-Wayne, 2010).

Thus, the findings suggest that kindergarten teachers would benefit from information about how play can facilitate children's development and learning. For pre-service teachers, a basic course (not just one or two lessons within a longer course) would be beneficial for introducing basic knowledge about play. For in-service teachers, retraining courses can serve to revitalize and update the knowledge and skills related to implementing "learning through play" as recommended by the *Guide* (CDC, 2006).

As discussed in Chapters 2, 5 and 6, there is resistance in Confucian-heritage cultures to learning through play. Confucian principles assume that play can distract children's learning and become a barrier to academic achievement. The findings of this study indicate that in order to promote children's holistic development, a general understanding of the advantages of learning through play would be beneficial. However, the influence of the Confucian heritage remains strong. One potential strategy is to stimulate greater recognition of learning through play among teachers, parents and the general public. Workshops and seminars providing understanding of the value of play, its

nature, and similarities to Confucius's ideas may be appropriate, especially if the focus is a mixture of Western ideas and Chinese characteristics (Rao & Li, 2009).

The impact of reinforcing students' good behaviour or effective academic work has long been recognized. Teachers influence students through reward and punishment and by the ways in which they structure classroom goals and objectives (MacBlain, 2014). Teachers can affect children's creativity, problem solving and critical thinking by organizing classroom environments to support these aspects of learning. In the present study, teachers dominated the classroom activities and daily schedules. Accordingly, it is desirable for teachers to regularly re-examine their fundamental value systems (such as Confucianism) and the influence of these value systems on teaching approaches, especially if they conflict with the recommended curriculum approach, such as the promotion of learning through play that occurs in the *Guide* (CDC, 2006).

8.5.1 Play

The benefits of play have long been emphasized by scholars and educators in Western countries. According to Wood (2009), "play contributes to learning and development, and that learning and development can be seen in play" (p. 172). However, HK parents do not view play as an essential part of child development; instead, they perceive it as a hindrance to children's academic attainment (Wong et al., 2011). The *Guide* (CDC, 2006) suggests that "no matter which learning and teaching strategy is adopted, play is an indispensable and important tool for facilitating children's learning",

and that "through play, children can develop their physical, intellectual, social, creative and thinking abilities. Play is considered to be the best activity for promoting children's physical and mental development" (p. 51). Nevertheless, the latest Quality Assurance Inspection (QAI) Annual Reports of the HK government found that teaching practices were teacher-directed (Education Bureau, 2006/7). In many cases, teachers are reluctant to fully implement a play-based approach in early childhood settings (Wu, 2014; Wong et al., 2011) because of pressure from parents and cultural expectations that children should be equipped to succeed academically. This results, therefore, in a fundamental tension between what is promoted in The *Guide* (CDC, 2006), and how teachers enact the curriculum and pedagogy in their classrooms.

Data in this study showed that not all children had the chance to experience free-play time. Although some had the opportunity to choose their favourite activities or toys in the learning corners, they were granted, at most, 15 minutes of free-play in a learning corner. Children had relatively little time to exercise personal choice, and follow their own interests. This finding is consistent with other studies in HK kindergartens (Wong et al., 2011). It seems that the government's suggested play-based teaching approach has not been well implemented by teachers, and that "play is used in the classroom as a tool for knowledge transmission, leaving children with very few opportunities to choose what they like to play" (Wong et al., 2011, p. 167). Implementing play in HK is a complex issue, because HK parents show greater concern about their children's achievement-

oriented activities and academic schoolwork (Li et al., 2012; Pong & Chow, 2002; Wong et al., 2011; Wu, 2014), viewing education as a method to ensure a quality future. Given this combination of cultural beliefs, government policies and classroom practices, it is not surprising that it can be difficult to implement play in HK kindergarten classrooms.

It seems that there are tensions between what government policy recommends, and the everyday pressures associated with parents' expectations. These tensions play out in the teachers' classrooms, and it is clear that play-based teaching practices end up as subordinate to academic curriculum content (Wood, 2009). According to Wood (2009), such issues are relevant in global contexts in which play in early childhood settings is accorded different priority than academic learning such as in many Asian countries. Therefore, learning through play can be considered as a practice that is "channelled through complex reciprocal and responsive relationships, and is situated in activities that are socially constructed and mediated" (Wood, 2009, p. 172).

Elsewhere, Lillemyr (2003) draws our attention to the role of adult involvement in play while DeVries (1997) points to the importance of adults who can accommodate children's interests and at the same time validate a pedagogy of play. However, according to Johnson, Christie, and Wardle (2005), good play-based approaches remain a serious challenge for many countries. Teachers have to deal with different challenges such as time constraints, responsibility, performance and attainment, and competing views of what constitutes effective learning and teaching (Johnson et al., 2005). That is, teachers

might have difficulty in finding time for children to play.

One recommendation is that longer free-play time could be implemented in the daily schedule of pre-school classrooms, as free-play can provide opportunities for children to make contact with others, which also helps them in building academic skills. A prolonged time is proposed for children's engagement with peers and their environment (e.g. through learning corners), of perhaps 20-30 minutes daily. Engagement is important for encouraging children to communicate with peers and interact with their environment. In their EPPE study conducted in the UK, Sylva et al. (2004, p.6) suggested that "sustained shared thinking", which is interactions among two or more people "work together" to work things out are beneficial for both children and teachers. The idea of engagement is consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) idea that children learn and develop higher-level thinking through interacting socially with others. In fact, Robson (2010) pointed out that children need opportunities to carry on activities continuously in order to sustain their interest over long periods of time without having teachers pushing them to create final products. Thus, teachers could offer children activities that will provide more opportunities and time to achieve the purposes identified in the *Guide* (CDC, 2006).

Only one class had a chance to play outdoors during the observation period for this study. Generally speaking, most kindergartens in HK are small in size. Many of them cannot afford an outdoor playground, although teachers recognize the importance of playing outside. However, losing opportunities to play outside freely may mean "less

opportunity for physical exercise, for learning about their environment, and for social interaction" (Robson, 2010, p. 226). It is important for teachers to provide time for physical activities. In addition, "eduplay" (Rao & Li, 2009) could serve as an alternative application of play in HK kindergarten classrooms. Eduplay, a mixture of play-based and teacher-directed education consistent with a Chinese perspective, offers a way of incorporating play and learning in HK kindergartens (Rao & Li, 2009). In eduplay, children play in order to learn, and teachers can design eduplay activities according to children's needs. That is, children play with learning-related purposes, this approach differs from the Western idea of play, which is generally child-initiated and has little teacher intervention.

8.5.2 Creativity

Fostering students' creativity has recently gained significant attention in HK (Chan & Yuen, 2014; Cheung & Leung, 2014). According to Tsang (2007), the HK government intends to change the city's image to that of a creative city in Asia. The HK education reforms (CDC, 2001) emphasise creativity, which is also an important objective in the *Guide* to the Pre-Primary Curriculum (CDC, 2006). The *Guide* recommends that teachers enhance "children's creative and imaginative powers" and encourage children to "enjoy participating in creative works" (p. 20). Regardless of the *Guide's* recommendations, however, the notion of enhancing creativity in ECE is challenging for pre-school teachers. In HK, pre-school teachers are influenced by a social and cultural context that relies on

the transmission of knowledge and a teacher-centred instructional approach (Cheung & Leung, 2014). In their study, Cheung and Leung (2014) attempted to develop a rating scale entitled *Creative Personality Questionnaire* (CPQ) to "elicit HK Chinese preschool teachers' perceptions of creative personality and to determine the factor structure of the CPQ" (p. 78). They found that most of the personality characteristics in the CPQ were compatible with qualities such as being "well mannered, honest, cautious, and need for recognition in the discipline domain reflects the influence of Chinese culture" (Cheung & Leung, 2014, p. 78). According to their findings, more than 70 percent of HK Chinese preschool teachers reported that they were neither a creative nor a non-creative teacher. The researchers concluded that "although HK preschool teachers had a shared view of the important personality characteristics of a creative teacher, they were not confident in their own creativity as teachers" (p. 86).

As found in this study (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7), teachers in HK have tended to focus on delivering factual knowledge, and giving explanations and instructions to kindergarten/young children. In her study, Cheung (2012) found that most teachers considered developing students' creativity to be important; however, teachers' understanding of how to promote creativity was very limited. Cheung (2012) stated that HK teachers experienced little school learning or teacher training in the area of creativity. In addition, Cheng (2010), and Forrester and Hui (2007) argued that teachers are attempting to implement creativity in the classroom, but that many of them have

encountered problems related to large class sizes, lack of teaching time, pressures to deal with an academic curriculum, and limited pedagogical knowledge about how to support students' creativity.

Elsewhere, Kim (2007) has suggested, controversially, that people from Confucian societies such as HK are less creative than those from Western societies. According to Kim, "Confucianism focused on learning in a mechanical way without thought or meaning, which has evolved to the extent that students in such cultures are considered to lack abstract thinking abilities, to over-emphasize concrete examples, and to lack originality and creativity" (p. 31). Data from the present study revealed that kindergarten children were required to follow the daily schedules planned by the teachers. Children needed to obey classroom rules, and teachers told children what to do. In most cases, teachers hurried children through finishing everyday tasks such as homework and artwork so as to remain strictly on schedule. Such features are inimical to the development of creativity. Despite the government's intention to remake HK as a creative city, these four kindergarten teachers retained their traditional classroom practices, which seemed to be consistent with Confucius's ideas in general.

Given the influence of Confucian principles, Kim (2007) suggested that teachers need to be aware of their cultural values and how they may promote or hinder creative thinking, as such awareness may "empower teachers to make choices for an environment that nurtures creativity" (p. 28). For example, in a teacher-centred classroom where rules

and routines are important, children need to learn to do things according to time. A tightly restricted classroom schedule in terms of time allocation can impede children's opportunities for creative exploration (Kim, 2007). When teachers relax their insistence on strictly scheduled activities and focus on children's individual needs, there will be greater likelihood that children can have more chances to play, experiment, explore, think and imagine (Kim, 2007). Therefore, when teachers are arranging their timetable, they could plan to use time in a more flexible manner (CDC, 2006). For example, the learning activities should have enough time for the children to explore and find answers for themselves (CDC, 2006).

8.5.3 Classroom Environment

According to the *Guide* (CDC, 2006), "a well-designed and richly decorated learning environment not only creates a relaxed and pleasurable atmosphere, but also promotes effective learning classrooms for young children" (p. 46). All teachers in this study designed and changed their classroom environment, which included learning corners according to the theme of the week. The learning corners were mainly for quiet activities. However, as explained above, not all children had the opportunities to explore the learning corners.

It is widely acknowledged that children need discovery and play to motivate their thinking processes (Wong et al., 2011). They also need spaces and opportunities to explore and experiment with their surroundings. The *Guide* (CDC, 2006) encourages

teachers to give children opportunities to make choices and decisions, as a way of developing self-confidence. The *Guide* also suggests creating more time and chances for children to explore the learning environment, individually or in groups, and that children should be able to choose their playmates and have access to learning corners that are "comprehensive and well-balanced" (CDC, 2006, p. 40). Further, the *Guide* specifically mentions learning corners, stating that they should cater for children's "holistic development in the cognitive, language, physical, affective, social and aesthetic aspects" (p. 40). For example, children may be encouraged to read stories on their own or play with their friends in the toy corner. To enact the curriculum as intended, teachers could consider creating bigger spaces so as to permit a larger group of children to play together. By playing in a bigger group, children may learn to socialize with peers and thus further develop their social skills. In addition, the *Guide* states that pretend play and dramatic play can be effective ways for children to "express their inner feelings and explore the real world" (CDC, 2006, p. 41). To realise these objectives, teachers may set up dramatic corners with a variety of materials to encourage children to engage in different types of play. In addition, children may benefit from a play-based curriculum in which they genuinely initiate and are self-motivated to participate in a variety of play activities.

In sum, for a play-based curriculum to function effectively, teachers must reconsider curriculum and teaching practices, reorganize learning environments, and listen to what children have to say about play (Cheng, 2010). Above all, a balance of

pretend and dramatic play where children have opportunities to explore and develop creative and critical thinking and problem-solving skills is vital. That is, children should not simply be left to play. Organizing and creating spaces for free play with different props, which can provide engaging, hands-on opportunities for children (Cary, 2007), is recommended for 20-30 minutes per day.

8.5.4 Critical Thinking

Members of society must learn to accept each other and to engage in constructive feedback when they disagree with other members, without feeling excluded. Accordingly, preparing youngsters to think critically and constructively should be a key task for pre-school teachers (Senechal, 2010), as members of society need opportunities to developing such capabilities from a very young age. Critical thinking offers an opportunity for educating the mind (Paul & Elder, 2008). Practice in presenting one's thoughts and critiquing other people's thoughts can be one strategy to enhance such development. Another strategy to promote critical thinking is to provide children with a safe environment where they can be comfortable sharing their thoughts and where they are allowed and encouraged to ask questions (Senechal, 2010).

Kindergarten is a place of preparation for the future and children must learn how to behave in order to fit in (Koza & Smith, 2007). Observations in this study revealed that all four classrooms were characterized by a strong emphasis on routines and rules. Granted, children must be well-behaved and obedient in society; in fact, a certain degree

of obedience to rules is expected from every citizen and every member of an organization (Dowd, 2008). Therefore, children need to be aware of the importance of rules. However, the danger in this passive obedience arises when children never learn to question intolerable or unfair rules because they never have had a chance to learn about and use critical thinking. Therefore, caution must be observed so as not to become too focused on children's obedience and conformity, or else we might neglect the development of more important abilities such as creativity, critical thinking and problem solving.

8.5.5 Problem Solving

Problem solving is the basis of a young child's learning, and it is regarded as one of the most important skills that learners need to retain (Sen, 2013). Through exploring, investigating, testing and making assumptions, and finally solving problems, children gain meaningful and personal learning experiences (Sen, 2013). Conflicts offer a vital context for children's development of social and cognitive abilities (Joseph & Strain, 2010). As conflicts can occur frequently in pre-school classrooms, it is important to consider how teachers might use these opportunities to help children to learn problem-solving skills. According to Dereli-Iman (2014), problem solving is a necessary life skill that fosters children's self-concept and sense of independence and should be encouraged from an early age. Tengano, Sawyers, and Moran (1989) claimed that a positive relationship exists between play and problem-solving ability. Play activities contain situations for children to discover and solve problems. The problems encountered in play

situations represent real problems in children's lives and are therefore meaningful to them (Joseph & Strain, 2010). Children who are encouraged to play out their problems are more apt to learn generalizable skills and become better equipped to cope with life problems than children who are presented with teacher-made problems and then taught one specific right solution (Dereli-Iman, 2014; Tegnano et al. 1989).

However, young children are developmentally unable to solve problems logically and that it would be unreasonable to expect them to solve problems on their own without adults' support and training. Thinking and problem-solving abilities can be gained through observation, different activities, exploration and discourse (CDC, 2006). When teachers articulate the problems that they encounter and discuss with children how to resolve those problems, children become more conscious of the implications of the problem-solving practice. Moreover, when children play and work together to try to solve problems, they learn from each other's experiences (Joseph & Strain, 2010).

In fact, the *Guide* (2006) and Leung (2011) suggests that through play children can interact with peers and such interactions can enhance children's social competence behaviours. The data from this study suggest that children's play, creative and critical thinking, and problem-solving skills need further enhancement in HK kindergartens, due to several factors. It seems that Confucius's views on education significantly affect parents' ways of teaching and nurturing children. Although the government and local studies have recommended the values of play, creative and critical thinking, and problem

solving, teachers' classroom practices have remained much as they were a long time ago, with a heavy academic orientation and a focus on classroom discipline, rules and routines.

It seems that escaping from a cultural tradition (in this case, Confucianism) is extremely difficult if not impossible in a Chinese society such as HK. According to Lillemyr (2009), play is a cultural phenomenon as it is anchored to a child's culture. Some way must be found to tackle contradictory values in the surrounding culture if we believe that learning through play and the design of classroom environments are important to enhance children's creative and critical thinking and problem solving.

8.5.6 Play Lessons

Therefore, based on the findings of this study, I recommend incorporation of "play lessons" designed to accommodate Chinese cultural characteristics and Chinese notions of education that are peculiar to HK. The play lessons might be informative for other non-Western countries which are influenced by Confucian heritage culture, in which play is not given comparable importance in early childhood curricula. Play lessons would involve "playing for a purpose" or, to use Rao and Li (2009) term, "eduplay". In HK, Leung (2011) adapted the idea of eduplay and conducted a study (see Chapter 2) in which he found that parents accepted this idea and that the children's social competence improved significantly after 10 eduplay lessons. Leung suggested that eduplay can be applied to areas of teaching and learning such as the development of problem solving skills.

Time and contents are crucial elements in the play lessons. Play lessons may be scheduled as a compulsory activity for 20 -30 minutes in a school day, like other lessons such as English or Mandarin in HK kindergartens. Alternatively, the timing and frequency of the play lesson could be adapted to suit the schedule of a particular kindergarten, with play lessons perhaps occurring once, twice, or three days each week. Such a flexible arrangement is considered because "finding time for play in the busy school day can be a daunting challenge" (Johnson et al., 2005, p. 262). However, the play lesson should be aimed at helping children to develop creative and critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, which are vital to success and fulfilment in today's society. Development of these skills, rather than specific academic elements, should be the objectives of the play lessons. Teachers designing the play lesson curriculum would be intentionally incorporating Western ideas of learning through play. Figure 8.2 shows the idea of play lesson curriculum. Children would be entitled to enjoy their play lesson wholeheartedly, regardless of their abilities and capacities, or speed in homework completion.

In play lessons, the role of teacher is to provide support rather than to take control. The role of teacher includes enablement and engagement according to children's developmental levels. The plan for play will be intentional, for example, the teacher might see an opportunity to focus on promoting children's problem solving skills, creative and critical thinking by integrating time, space and materials for play. By

observing children's play, the teacher may encourage children to plan their roles, to talk to their peers, and ask open-ended questions. Sometimes the teacher might get involved in children's play as a co-player, using modelling strategies and suggesting ideas to enhance play themes and directions and to support children's progress.

Children will need a large enough area for playing, preferably, a play room, in which materials for play are displayed and stored. The kinds of displays and materials in the play room will not be static, but will vary according to different themes or some current topics of interest such as Christmas. The theme may last for two weeks to one month, depending on children's ongoing interest in the theme/s. Children may carry on activities continuously (Robson, 2010) for 20 to 30 minutes in the play lessons without being interrupted. They will be able to explore the play environment, choose materials and engage in specific activities (Gordon & Browne, 2014). The teacher will arrange different materials in the play room, such as dress up clothes and moveable parts which are open-ended and thereby available to enhance creativity, as children within this timeframe will have opportunities to think, plan and practice. The organization of materials in the play room will be important so that children can discern what is available and be focused on choosing materials for play and returning them when they have finished. When materials on shelves and trays are well arranged, children will be able to see their choices clearly.

In order to make play lessons a success, teachers and parents have a major role to play. They must fully understand the values of play and how it can be a powerful tool to help children to grow in cognitive, social, emotional, psychological and physical domains (Ashiabi, 2007; Lee, Burkam, Ready, Honigman, & Meisels, 2006). Providing play-based workshops, seminars and courses for teachers would allow them to recognize the

Figure 8.2. The play lesson curriculum

advantageous elements of play-based learning for children's development such as creative and critical thinking, and problem-solving. In addition, professional development could be offered to ensure that all teachers would have the same information and could work together in order to plan and develop ideas for play lessons.

As parents are a main influence on teachers' classroom practices, parents should be advised carefully about the benefits of play in children's learning (Wu, 2014). Videos, workshops and seminars about play in pre-school classrooms are appropriate ways for parents to learn about the value of play. Also, pre-schools could videotape play lessons in classrooms so that teachers can observe children's performance and their progression in creative and critical thinking, and problem solving. Video recordings could be played on a monitor near the entrance to the pre-school so that parents could watch their children's performances during play lessons and see how the children are developing essential cognitive, social, emotional and physical abilities.

Children's learning through play can also be documented using portfolios, which are systematic records of important information (CDC, 2006). As children's development is a continuous process, it takes on different forms at various stages, and it is important to recognize milestones. However, when a school uses portfolios, adequate training needs to be provided to ensure that teachers can understand and recognize the relevant abilities to be documented and that the resources available for this purpose are adequate (CDC, 2006). For example, teachers need to know how to collect feedback from children and parents throughout the implementation process. Portfolios can then be passed on to parents or later teachers for follow-up action as the children advance to higher grades.

8.5.7 Future research

It seems that play remains susceptible when comparing it with policy discourses and influences of primary school curriculum although optimistic results have been found in research and policy documents (Wood, 2009). As a result, to create a better pedagogy of play, one which is theoretically vigorous and empirically justified continues to be an important issue in the early childhood field (Wood, 2009) if parents and the general public are to be persuaded the values of play. According to Wood (2009), there is a "significant gap in research is knowledge about how play progresses and how children's learning progresses through play within and beyond early childhood" (p. 185). That is, teachers should be able to recognize children's progress in play and progress through play.

In this study, the four teachers generally agreed that a child-centred approach emphasizing learning through play could enhance children's learning. However, not all children in this study experienced free-play time or had opportunities to choose their activities. The following suggestions are offered for further research: i) use of a larger sample to investigate teachers' views about free-play time and the current opportunities for it, and the types of experiences that children might have during free-play time; ii) investigation of the impacts of different corners on children's learning; iii) investigating what children think of different learning corners; and iv) studying parents' views on free-play time, as their opinions are frequently cited as a reason for providing an academic curriculum in HK kindergartens. Finally, if the idea of play lessons is introduced into HK

kindergartens teachers and parents need to be prepared and supported in this initiative as it represents a change for all. Research on what teachers and parents think about this idea and its implementation will be crucial.

8.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY AND FINAL REMARKS

Children are the leaders of tomorrow. In order to find a better way to meet the learning needs of these future leaders, the challenge facing ECE is how to proactively meet the demand for talent in our future society (CDC, 2006).

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Appendices

Appendix A

Consent form for the kindergarten principals

QUT Queensland University of Technology Brisbane Australia	**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FOR QUT RESEARCH PROJECT: Kindergarten principals**

Curriculum and pedagogical practices in four Hong Kong kindergartens

RESEARCH TEAM CONTACTS

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DESCRIPTION

This project is being undertaken as part of a Doctor of Philosophy for Joyce Ho.

The project is to investigate teachers' perspectives on Thematic and Project Approaches in the context of their own classroom practices.

The researcher requests your assistance to investigate kindergarten teachers' views and practices about thematic and project approaches in kindergartens in Hong Kong.

PARTICIPATION

Your teacher's participation in this project is voluntary. If you do agree to let your teacher to participate, your teacher can withdraw from participation at any time during the project without comment or penalty. Your teacher's decision to participate will in no way impact upon your current or future relationship with QUT (for example your grades) or with the Institute of Education.

Your teacher's participation will involve two interviews and nine classroom observations. Your teacher will

be asked to provide and discuss her teaching plans and evaluations, children's assessment records, artworks, homework, and for her views regarding to teaching approaches in kindergartens. The duration of the interview is around one hour. The interviews will be audio recorded. Classrooms observation: the classroom will be observed for 3 weeks, three days per week for two hours each session. All observation sessions will be video recorded. Parental consent will be sought for video recording of children in the teachers' classrooms.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

It is expected that this project will not benefit you or your teacher directly. However, the knowledge gained from this study will contribute to understanding teaching practices in Hong Kong kindergartens.

RISKS

There are no risks beyond normal day-to-day living associated with your teacher's participation in this project.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The findings of this study will be used for teaching at the Institute of Education and for conference presentations. The video and audio data will not be used in its raw form and will be destroyed after transcription.

All comments and responses will be treated confidentially. Pseudonyms will be used in all publications and presentations.

Teachers can review the audio-recording of the interviews and the video-recording of the observations. Audio and video-recordings can be erased if the teachers request this.

Supervisors can access the data.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

We would like to ask you to sign a written consent form (enclosed) to confirm your agreement to let your teacher to participate.

QUESTIONS / FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT

Please contact one of the research team members named above to have any questions answered or if you require further information about the project.

CONCERNS / COMPLAINTS REGARDING THE CONDUCT OF THE PROJECT

QUT is committed to research integrity and the ethical conduct of research projects. However, if you do have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project you may contact the QUT Research Ethics Unit on +61 7 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au. The QUT Research Ethics Unit is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an impartial manner.

Thank you for helping with this research project. Please keep this sheet for your information.

Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

CONSENT FORM FOR QUT RESEARCH PROJECT: Kindergarten principals

Curriculum and pedagogical practices in four Hong Kong kindergartens

RESEARCH TEAM CONTACTS

Joyce Ho PhD Candidate Queensland University of Technology Australia 852 2948 8268 jho@ied.edu.hk B1-2F-32, 10, Lo Ping Road, Tai Po, Hong Kong.	Professor Sue Grieshaber School of Early Childhood Queensland University of Technology Australia +61 7 3138 3176 s.grieshaber@qut.edu.au

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- have read and understood the information document regarding this project
- have had any questions answered to your satisfaction
- understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team
- understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty
- understand that you can contact the Research Ethics Unit on +61 7 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project
- understand that the project will include video recording
- agree to allow the researcher to contact kindergarten teachers who may volunteer to participate in the study

Name .....

Signature .....

Date ..... / ..... / .....

Please return this sheet to the investigator.

Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

WITHDRAWAL OF CONSENT FOR QUT RESEARCH PROJECT

Curriculum and pedagogical practices in four Hong Kong kindergartens

RESEARCH TEAM CONTACTS

Joyce Ho PhD Candidate Queensland University of Technology Australia 852 2948 8268 jho@ied.edu.hk B1-2F-32, 10, Lo Ping Road, Tai Po, Hong Kong.	Professor Sue Grieshaber School of Early Childhood Queensland University of Technology Australia +61 7 3138 3176 s.grieshaber@qut.edu.au

I hereby wish to WITHDRAW my consent to participate in the research project named above.

I understand that this withdrawal WILL NOT jeopardise my relationship with Queensland University of Technology.

Name .....

Signature .....

Date ..... / ..... / .....

Appendix B

Queensland University of Technology Brisbane Australia	**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FOR QUT RESEARCH PROJECT: Teachers**

Curriculum and pedagogical practices in four Hong Kong kindergartens

RESEARCH TEAM CONTACTS

Joyce Ho – Senior Teaching Fellow

The Hong Kong Institute of Education

852 2948 8268

jho@ied.edu.hk

Sue Grieshaber – Professor

School of Early Childhood Education

61 7 3138 3176

s.Grieshaber@qut.edu.ac

DESCRIPTION

This project is being undertaken as part of a Doctorate of Philosophy for Joyce Ho.

The project is to investigate teachers' perspectives on Thematic and Project Approaches in the context of their own classroom practices.

The researcher requests your assistance to investigate kindergarten teachers' views and practices about thematic and project approaches in kindergartens in Hong Kong.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this project is voluntary. If you do agree to participate, you can withdraw from participation at any time during the project without comment or penalty. Your decision to participate will in no way impact upon your current or future relationship with QUT (for example your grades) or with the Institute of Education.

Your participation will involve two interviews and nine classroom observations. You will be asked to provide and discuss your teaching plans and evaluations, children's assessment records, artworks, homework, and for your views regarding to teaching approaches in kindergartens. The duration of the interview is around one hour. The interviews will be audio recorded. Classrooms observation: the classroom will be observed for 3 weeks, three days per week for two hours each session. All observation sessions will be video recorded.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

It is expected that this project will not benefit you directly. However, the knowledge gained from this study will contribute to understanding teaching practices in Hong Kong kindergartens.

RISKS

There are no risks beyond normal day-to-day living associated with your participation in this project.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All comments and responses are anonymous and will be treated confidentially. Pseudonyms will be used in all publications and presentations.

Teachers can review the audio-recording of the interviews and the video-recording of the observations. Supervisors can access the data.

Audio and video-records can be erased if the teachers request.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

We would like to ask you to sign a written consent form (enclosed) to confirm your agreement to participate.

QUESTIONS / FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT

Please contact one of the research team members named above to have any questions answered or if you require further information about the project.

CONCERNS / COMPLAINTS REGARDING THE CONDUCT OF THE PROJECT

QUT is committed to research integrity and the ethical conduct of research projects. However, if you do have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project you may contact the QUT Research Ethics Unit on +61 7 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au. The QUT Research Ethics Unit is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an impartial manner.

Thank you for helping with this research project. Please keep this sheet for your information.

Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

CONSENT FORM FOR QUT RESEARCH PROJECT

Curriculum and pedagogical practices in four Hong Kong kindergartens

RESEARCH TEAM CONTACTS

Joyce Ho – Senior Teaching Fellow

The Hong Kong Institute of Education

852 2948 8268

jho@ied.edu.hk

Sue Grieshaber – Professor

School of Early Childhood Education

61 7 3138 3176

s.Grieshaber@qut.edu.ac

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- have read and understood the information document regarding this project
- have had any questions answered to your satisfaction
- understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team
- understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty
- understand that you can contact the Research Ethics Unit on +61 7 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project
- understand that the project will include video recording
- agree to participate in the project

Name .....

Signature .....

Date ..... / ..... / .....

Please return this sheet to the investigator.

Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

WITHDRAWAL OF CONSENT FOR QUT RESEARCH PROJECT

Curriculum and pedagogical practices in four Hong Kong kindergartens

RESEARCH TEAM CONTACTS

Joyce Ho – Senior Teaching Fellow	Sue Grieshaber – Professor
The Hong Kong Institute of Education	School of Early Childhood Education
852 2948 8268	61 7 3138 3176
jho@ied.edu.hk	s.Grieshaber@qut.edu.ac

I hereby wish to WITHDRAW my consent to participate in the research project named above.

I understand that this withdrawal WILL NOT jeopardise my relationship with Queensland University of Technology.

Name .....

Signature .....

Date ..... / ..... / .....

Appendix C

Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FOR QUT RESEARCH PROJECT: Parents

Curriculum and pedagogical practices in four Hong Kong kindergartens

RESEARCH TEAM CONTACTS

Joyce Ho – Senior Teaching Fellow

The Hong Kong Institute of Education

852 2948 8268

jho@ied.edu.hk

Sue Grieshaber – Professor

School of Early Childhood Education

61 7 3138 3176

s.Grieshaber@qut.edu.ac

DESCRIPTION

This project is being undertaken as part of a Doctorate of Philosophy for Joyce Ho.

The project is to investigate teachers' perspectives on Thematic and Project Approaches in the context of their own classroom practices.

The researcher requests your child's assistance to investigate kindergarten teachers' views and practices about thematic and project approaches in kindergartens in Hong Kong.

PARTICIPATION

Your child's participation in this project is voluntary. If you do agree your child to participate, you can withdraw from participation at any time during the project without comment or penalty. Your decision to let your child to participate will in no way impact upon your child's current or future relationship with QUT (for example your grades) or with the Institute of Education.

Your child's participation will involve nine classroom observations. Your child's classroom will be observed for 3 weeks, three days per week for two hours each session. All observation sessions will be video recorded.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

It is expected that this project will not benefit you or your child directly. However, the knowledge gained from this study will contribute to understanding teaching practices in Hong Kong kindergartens.

RISKS

There are no risks beyond normal day-to-day living associated with your child's participation in this project.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All comments and responses are anonymous and will be treated confidentially. Pseudonyms will be used in all publications and presentations.
Parents can review the video-recording of the observations. Supervisors can access the data.

Audio and video-records can be erased if the parents request.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

We would like to ask you to sign a written consent form (enclosed) to confirm your agreement to let your child to participate.

QUESTIONS / FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT

Please contact one of the research team members named above to have any questions answered or if you require further information about the project.

CONCERNS / COMPLAINTS REGARDING THE CONDUCT OF THE PROJECT

QUT is committed to research integrity and the ethical conduct of research projects. However, if you do have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project you may contact the QUT Research Ethics Unit on +61 7 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au. The QUT Research Ethics Unit is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an impartial manner.

Thank you for helping with this research project. Please keep this sheet for your information.

Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

CONSENT FORM FOR QUT RESEARCH PROJECT

Curriculum and pedagogical practices in four Hong Kong kindergartens

RESEARCH TEAM CONTACTS

Joyce Ho – Senior Teaching Fellow	Sue Grieshaber – Professor
The Hong Kong Institute of Education	School of Early Childhood Education
852 2948 8268	61 7 3138 3176
jho@ied.edu.hk	s.Grieshaber@qut.edu.ac

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- have read and understood the information document regarding this project
- have had any questions answered to your satisfaction
- understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team
- understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty
- understand that you can contact the Research Ethics Unit on +61 7 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project
- understand that the project will include video recording
- agree to participate in the project

Name .....

Signature .....

Date ..... / ..... / .....

STATEMENT OF CHILD CONSENT

Your parent or guardian has given their permission for you to be involved in this research project. This form is to seek your consent to participate in the research.

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- have read and understood the information about this project
- have discussed the project with your parent/guardian
- have had any questions answered to your satisfaction
- understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team
- understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty
- understand that you can contact the Research Ethics Officer on [+61 7] 3138 5123 or ethicscontact@qut.edu.au if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project
- understand that the project will include audio and/or video recording
- agree to participate in the project

Name .....

Signature .....

Date ..... / ..... / .....

Please return this sheet to the investigator.

Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

WITHDRAWAL OF CONSENT FOR QUT RESEARCH PROJECT

Curriculum and pedagogical practices in four Hong Kong kindergartens

RESEARCH TEAM CONTACTS

Joyce Ho – Senior Teaching Fellow

The Hong Kong Institute of Education

852 2948 8268

jho@ied.edu.hk

Sue Grieshaber – Professor

School of Early Childhood Education

61 7 3138 3176

s.Grieshaber@qut.edu.ac

I hereby wish to WITHDRAW my consent to participate in the research project named above.

I understand that this withdrawal WILL NOT jeopardise my relationship with Queensland University of Technology.

Name .....

Signature .....

Date ..... / ..... / .....

Appendix D

同意書

研究題目

探討香港幼稚園教法: 主題與方案教學

The Queensland University of Technology 教育學系邀請貴 子女參與由教育學系博士研究生何斯濃女士担任首席研究員，主理研究上述題目調查。這是一項關於幼兒教學法的學術研究，旨在了解香港幼稚園現行的主題與方案教學法的進行情況，並探討這些教學法與老師對幼兒學習信念的關係。是項研究將有助家長及幼教工作者理解幼兒教學法從而改善支援幼兒學習的方法。

貴 子女就讀的班別在進行主題/方案課堂將會被觀察及錄影，為期三星期。 每次觀察及錄影約兩小時，觀察內容圍繞老師在課堂如何教授及進行主題/方案教學法為主。是次研究並不為閣下提供個人利益，但所搜集數據將對研究主題/方案教學法的問題提供寶貴的資料。 是次參與純屬自願性質，您可隨時終止貴 子女參與是項行動，有關決定將不會引致任何不良後果。所收集的資料只作研究用途，個人資料將絕對保密。所有錄影紀錄將由首席研究員保管並在研究報告發表後三年銷毀。如您對是項研究有任何問題，可隨時提出。

如日後你對是項研究有任何查詢，請與首席研究員何斯濃女士聯絡 (電話: 2948 8268 或 電郵: jho@ied.edu.hk)。如你想知道更多有關研究參與者的權益，請聯絡 The Queensland University of technology 非臨床研究操守委員會 (電話: 617 31385123 或 電郵: ethicscontact@qut.edu.au)。

如你明白以上內容，並願意讓貴 子女參與是項研究，請在下方簽署。

家長姓名：_____

簽署: _____

日期 :_____

非常感謝您的幫忙!

Appendix E

First Teacher Interview protocol

Date _____ *Time* _____
School _____ *Teacher* _____
Venue _____ *Interview length* _____

Professional background and experience
1. Teacher Qualifications:
2. Years of teaching experience:
3. Years of teaching K3:
4. Length of time teaching at this kindergarten:

Class size, teacher-child ratio and grouping
5. What is the teacher-child ratio in your class? Are you satisfied with it? Why/why not?
6. How do you group the children in your class and why you do it this way? How you form the groups? How are the groups different for different learning activities?

Classroom environment
7. How do you organize your classroom's physical environment (such as learning corners, materials and furniture)? Why?
8. How often do you change the learning corners and display areas? What prompts you to make a change?
9. What are your goals or aims for the classroom environment?

Routine
10. What are the timetable, routines and rules in your class? Tell me about the routine of a typical day in your classroom.
11. Is this routine followed every day? (May ask the teacher for a copy of the daily routine timetable). What prompts you to make a change to the routine?
12. What routines are most important in your classroom? Why?

Teaching strategies (curriculum and pedagogy)
13. Please briefly describe the teaching approaches / strategies / methodologies that you have used in the past week.
14. What hinders you in promoting your teaching approaches / strategies and methodologies? (May ask the teacher for examples when they provide)
15. How do parents respond to your teaching practices?
16. In what ways do parental preferences impact on your teaching practices? (May ask teacher for more examples of parents' impact)
17. How do the school policies have impact on your teaching practices? (May ask teacher to give examples for the policies which have to be followed)
18. How do the government policies have impact on your teaching practices? (May ask teacher to give examples for the policies which have to be followed)

Teaching approach (thematic/ project approach)
19. How do you know about the 'project approach / thematic approach'?
20. What do you think are the main differences between the 'project approach / thematic approach' and the traditional teaching approach? (May ask the teacher for the

examples of the content of the thematic/ project approach and if there are books or other resources that are used for content for thematic/ project approaches).

21. Have you received any specific training about the 'project approach / thematic approach'? What sort of training have you received? How has it influenced your teaching approaches?
22. How do you evaluate children's learning in the 'project approach / thematic approach'? Why do you use this kind of evaluate method? What do you think of it? (May ask the teacher for a blank copy if any).

Children's Learning experience

23. Please describe the learning atmosphere among the children in your classroom.
24. What is your opinion of 'child-initiated experiences? What is your opinion of 'child-directed experiences'? What do you use in your classroom? (May ask teacher to give examples)
25. What is your opinion of 'in-depth' learning? How does it happen in your classroom? How could you do it (if it doesn't happen?)

Teacher-child interaction

26. When would you have personal suggestions/ comments to individual child? Why?
27. What rules are most important in your classroom? How do you set up or choose the rules? Why? (May ask teacher to describe and give examples)
28. How do you interact with children and get them involved in activities? (May ask teacher to describe and give examples)

Appendix F

Second Teacher Interview Protocol
Date: 9 May 2012

- Collect the parent consent form, principal consent form and teaching plan for these few weeks

1. As I didn't observe for the whole am session, I would like to know the daily schedule. What happen when they get in the classroom? (e.g, when they will have snack time?

2. Do they have sum up time? (if yes, in what style? Discuss? Sharing? Reporting (with their products)?

3. Is it 3 teachers responsible for one group? What are the advantages of operating in this way?
4. When they will have the snack time?

5. Does your class has a fixed schedule/ timetable (I couldn't find it on the wall somewhere…) ? Are you allowed to change the time-table?

6. If children are not on tasks, what would you do?

7. How does this topic (the Air) start? (teacher initiate? Children initiate?)

8. Sometimes you ask children questions about the air? How you come up with these questions? You think the idea is important? Or according to children's interests?

9. Who prepares (the children? Or the teacher?) the books related to the Air topic?

10. The other two groups' activities are related to the topic of investigation?

11. The children need to do the home work every day?

12. What kind of homework they will have for a typical day? (English/ Mathematic/ Chinese)

13. Do the children have special lesson such as English, Art or Mandarin? How will they operate? How many lessons do they have for a week?

14. After this Air project, do the children have something to show? Do they have some plans?

Appendix G

Part 1: Key characteristics of teaching approaches

Key characteristics of project approach *(bk 1)* In the classroom there is evidence that the teacher:
1a. Promotes in-depth learning of events (1a(i) children pursue a focused project/ topic comprehensively and in details) Evidence of examples:
1b. Anchors phenomena in children's worlds (1b(i)children offering information 1b(ii) asking questions 1b(iii) conversing with peers & adults p. 476 bk. 6.) Evidence of examples:
1c. Creates meaning through interactions with the physical and social worlds (1c(i)teacher plans classroom activities according to children's everyday life experiences) Evidence of examples:
1d. Enables children to make choices and decisions (1d(i) providing a rich array of materials and activities from which children are invited to select) Evidence of examples:
1e. Follows children's interests (1e(i) children express desire to learn more about some aspect of the theme p. 476 bk. 6) Evidence of examples:
1f. Engages children in collaborative small group projects (1f(i) children working in groups) Evidence of examples:

1g. Focuses on finding answers to questions about a topic posed either by the children, the teacher, or the teacher working with the children.
(1g(i) 'What do the cameras look like?' (p.79 bk. 9.))

Evidence of examples:

1h. Promotes four types of learning:

i. Knowledge (information, concepts, relations and meaning)

Evidence of examples:

ii. Skills (basic academic skills such as literacy and numeracy, scientific and technical skills, social skills and personal relationships)

Evidence of examples:

iii. Dispositions (habits of mind, such as curiosity, approaches to work such as persistence, and preferences such as cooperative or solitary learning)

Evidence of examples:

iv. Feeling, (such as feelings of competence)

Evidence of examples:

Key characteristics of thematic approach *(from book 1)*

In the classroom there is evidence that the teacher

1i. Determines the content and directs children's learning (p.245 bk 1)
(1i(i) The teacher initially selects the topics and encourages children to contribute ideas).

Evidence of examples:
1j.Integrates two or more subject areas (1j(i) mathematics and science) Evidence of examples:
1k. Integrates broad topics to encourage the synthesis of ideas across multiple areas (1k(i) Four Seasons, animals, water etc.) Evidence of examples:
1l. Promotes connections across different spheres of learning (1l(i) food activities: cooking soup process, reading recipe, measure food ingredients ...) Evidence of examples:
1m. Promotes investigation of significant content (1m(i) animal: visit the Zoo, animal stories, books, movie etc.) Evidence of examples:
1n. Emphasizes and integrates different aspects of development and learning (p.68 bk 2) (1n(i) teacher arranges different activities according to children's needs) Evidence of examples:
1o. Initiates in response to children's interests or to complement children's interests (p.341 bk 5) (1o(i) teacher pays attention to children's questions and comments) Evidence of examples:
1p. Makes teaching relevant and specific to the particular group of children for which it is designed and incorporates children's ideas into actual planning (p.341 bk 5) (1p(i) teacher designs the classroom activities according to children's ideas) Evidence of examples:

Part 2: Key points when observing teachers in kindergartens settings

Part 2: Characteristics of kindergarten classroom (a comprehensive list drawn from early childhood education texts)
2a. Areas that are hard (p. 253 bk 1) (2a(i) art corner) Evidence of examples:
2b. Areas that are soft (2b(i) soft and cushiony area) Evidence of examples:
2c. Areas that encourage active (2c(i) supports large motor play, wheeled vehicles etc.)and Evidence of examples:
2d. Areas that encourage quiet activities (2d(i) contains blocks, manipulative, construction toys, puzzles, books etc.) (p. 253 bk 1) Evidence of examples:
2e. Areas that are aesthetically pleasing and respectful (p. 253 bk 1) private spaces (2e (i)A place where children can go for a bit of privacy, they can withdraw from the main group if they wish.) Evidence of examples:
2f. A number of open-ended resources and experiences for children to choose from (P.254 bk 1) (2f(i) art area with paint, crayons, play dough, scissors, boxes and string children can represent things they've done, seen and imagined) Evidence of examples:
2g. The environment and timetable are organized so that children flow from one physical space to another and from one experience to the next(P.254 bk 1)

(2g(i) move from a quiet area to a construction area and to a music and movement area) Evidence of examples:
2h. Quiet reflection is encouraged (bk 1, p.335) (2h(i) teacher asks children to recall and share their experiences.) Evidence of examples:
2i. creativity is encouraged (bk 1, p.335). (2i(i) open-ended questions encourage children to think creatively.) Evidence of examples:
2j. collaboration, interaction and relationships are encouraged (bk 1, p.335) (2j(i) teacher invites children to talk with each other about what they are doing.) Evidence of examples:
2k. Enough options for the children to choose from without unreasonable competition or waiting (bk 3, p. 290) (2k(i) children have the opportunity to join their favorite activities within 10 minutes.) Evidence of examples:
2l. Enough opportunities for interaction with the physical environment (2l (i) children can use the classroom's space and furniture/ facilitates if they want.) Evidence of examples:
2m. Enough opportunities for children's engagement in learning corners (2m(i) book and home corner) Evidence of examples:
2n. Sufficient (ie. Children don't have to wait for long for the turn of using the resources) resources that encourage active learning, involvement, negotiation and collaboration (bk 1, p.287) (2n(i) teacher plans for child-initiated learning by preparing the environment with rich and interesting materials.) p. 218. Bk 7)

Evidence of examples:
2o. Resources being organised in ways that are easily accessible to children and enable them to become deeply engaged in experiences of interest. (2o (i) classroom learning corners have different kinds of materials for the children to explore.) Evidence of examples:
2p. Sufficient space for children to explore and to form small groups (P. 353 bk1) (2p(i) A place/ corner in the classroom which is big enough to accommodate more than 4 children to work together.) Evidence of examples:
2q. Careful planning of spaces and resources that takes account of traffic flow and the amount of space needed for an experience so frustration and potential conflicts are avoided (p.353 bk 1) (2q(i) well organized learning corners) Evidence of examples:
2r. Open-ended resources (large beads and strings, wooden cubes, large Lego blocks, small pegs, board set wooden puzzles etc.)that children can use to represent their understandings (p.225 bk4) Evidence of examples:
2s. Opportunities for child choice - quiet and active experiences (2s(i) children can choose to have either quiet or active experiences as they wish. Quiet experience such as reading in the book corner, and active experience such as enjoying tapes or records in the music corner.) Evidence of examples:
2t. Opportunities for child choice - indoor and outdoor experiences (p.225 bk4) (2t(i) children can choose to play indoor or outdoor.) Evidence of examples:

2u. Large blocks of time (ie. More than half an hour) for children to investigate and interact with resources (p.225 bk4) (2u(i) children can stay in one corner or doing the same thing more than half an hour if they wish) Evidence of examples:
2v. Opportunities for children to learn collaboratively (p.225 bk4) (2v(i) children have opportunities to work together) Evidence of examples:
2w. Organize time and space so that children can return to experiences and projects, and extend their play and understandings (p.225 bk4) (2w(i) sharing time.) Evidence of examples:
2x. Display children's research and action in their learning and examples of their representation of ideas (p.225 bk4) (2x(i) areas for display children's work such as pictures & worksheets.) Evidence of examples:

Appendix H

Field note

Date: 7 Mar. 2012

Time: 10:00 – 12:00

Venue: School A

Teacher: Chantelle

Observed activities: Homework, free-play, music lesson, snack & circle time

When children finished their homework and workbook, they took an English workbook out of their schoolbags and **revised some English words (with pictures e.g. pizza).** When they finished the revision, they did **a rest gesture (with their heads on the table),** then the teacher (Chantelle) called **their names** and they went to choose different activities [in the learning corners] or toys they liked. The children made use of all the materials in the classroom: they tried to pick the beans with chopsticks, playing in the doll corner, used papers and art materials to do some art work, **playing computer games in the computer corner,** many of them tried to use a small piece of paper to cut into a thin long strip and measured it and challenged themselves and others by measuring the longest strip.

After the **free play time (around 20 minutes),** children went outside the classroom to have their music lesson. First of all, they played a special greeting game. That is, one child would be **chosen by Chantelle - she called one child's name**, the child who was being called upon would walk out from the queue and pretended he/she was an insects and that **the rest of the class would guess what the insect would be based on the child's gesture.**

Appendix I

(1/2)VID00001. MP4 Physical activity

Time	Code	Examples	Notes
002003	Rule	-children sit on the floor watch a child to play game	-Even when doing physical activity, children need to sit and wait for their turns
001814	Teacher Intervention	-teacher ask the children don't not sit too closed to each other	-children do the exercise one by one, other sitting on the floor and wait for their floor
001748	Discipline	-teacher call for two groups of children line up in front of the teacher to play game	- The class has been divided into four groups, two groups went in a room to do other exercise while two groups stay outside play 碌礙賽
001735	Discipline	-teacher call for another two groups of children line up in front of her to play game	
001712	?	-teacher asks two children to get two baskets and put in front of her	
001633	Instruction	-teacher gives instructions of how to play the games	
001602	Competition	-two group of children playing games one by one	
001341	Praise	-teacher praise children for doing well	-teacher ask children to pay attention to the middle and the side, don't get it wrong -children line up and waiting for their member and take their turns -children 'add oil' their members
001152	Instruction	-teacher give clear demonstration of how to play the game	-teacher sometime ask children to demonstrate but sometime she would show it herself
000951	Encouragement	-a ball was fallen on the floor, the teacher said 'never mind, pick it up is ok'.	-children play (use a spoon to deliver a small ball) one group by one group, the teacher keep remaindering one group after one group
000838	RH	-children raise hands to show interest of playing	-throughout the physical activity children have to wait for their turns

Appendix J

4/9 SANY0004.MP4 artwork (another group)		
000040	Praise	-teacher praise children for helping each other
000424	Praise	-teacher praises a child for his usage of different colours
000645 000720	Praise	-teacher praise a boy for doing well
000746	Praise	-teacher praise a girl for her beautiful drawing
6/9 SANY0006.MP4 Circle time		
001546 001523 001458	Praise	-teacher and children clap hands to praise the right answer
001321 001259	Praise	-teacher asks children to clap hands for a child's right answer
000826	Praise	'good! You can find out the differences'
000259	Praise	'Take photo of the flower, good!
7/9 SANY0007 Snack time		
000633	Praise	- teacher praises the red group behaving good
9/9 SANY0009.MP4 Music Time		
000121	Praise	-teacher praises children to get the right answer
000633	Praise	-teacher praise a child doing well
1/6 VID00016. MP4 Music time (continued)		
000447 000513 000623	Praise	-teacher claps hand to praise a child who provides a right answer

Appendix K

Chantelle

Academic	25
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Bell	1
Challenging question	2
Child initiative	8
Child/ child interaction	24
Children sharing	1
Children's choice	2
Children's question	4
Children's view	17
Clarify	6
Collective	10
Comment	6
Conflict	3
Connective	1
Corner usage	12
Creativity	2